

Caregiver Stress

Caregiver stress is the emotional strain created by having to care for another person. Studies show that caregiving can take a toll on a person's physical and emotional health. Caregivers are more likely to suffer from depression than their peers. Limited research suggests that caregivers may also be more likely to have health problems like diabetes and heart disease than non-caregivers.

Risk Factors for Caregiver Stress

Caring for a loved one strains even the most resilient people. If you are a caregiver, it is important to take steps to preserve your health and well-being.

People who experience caregiver stress can be vulnerable to changes in their health. Risk factors for caregiver stress include:

- Living with the person you are caring for
- Social isolation
- Having depression
- Financial difficulties
- A higher number of hours spent caregiving
- Lack of coping skills and difficulty solving problems
- Lack of choice in being a caregiver

Those who are actively caring for an older adult often do not self-identify as a "caregiver." Recognizing this role can help caregivers receive the support they need.

Symptoms of Caregiver Stress

If you have any of the following symptoms, caregiving may be putting too much strain on you:

- Sleeping problems, such as sleeping too much or too little
- Change in eating habits, often resulting in weight gain or loss
- Feeling tired or without energy most of the time
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy, such as going out with friends, walking or reading
- Easily irritated, angered or saddened
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches or other physical problems

Tips for Managing Caregiver Stress

It is important to take advantage of the many resources and tools available to help caregivers to help them provide care for their loved ones. To care for others, it is essential to take the time to care for yourself.

Consider the following tips to help manage caregiver stress:

- **Accept help.** Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would like to do. For instance, a friend may offer to take the person you care for on a walk a couple of times a week. Or a friend or family member may be able to run an errand, pick up your groceries or cook for you.
- **Focus on what you can provide.** It is normal to feel guilty sometimes, but understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.
- **Set realistic goals.** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine. Begin to say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting holiday meals.
- **Get connected.** Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Many communities have classes specifically about the disease your loved one is facing. Caregiving services such as transportation, meal delivery or housekeeping may be available.
- **Join a support group.** A support group can provide validation and encouragement, as well as problem-solving strategies for difficult situations. People in support groups understand what you may be going through. A support group can also be a good place to create meaningful friendships.
- **Seek social support.** Make an effort to stay well-connected with family and friends who can offer nonjudgmental emotional support. Set aside time each week for connecting, even if it's just a walk with a friend.
- **Set personal health goals.** For example, set goals to establish a good sleep routine, find time to be physically active on most days of the week, eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water.
- **See your doctor.** Get recommended vaccinations and screenings. Make sure to tell your doctor that you're a caregiver. Don't hesitate to mention any concerns or symptoms you have.

Take advantage of local resources for caregivers. To get started, check out the Eldercare Locator or contact your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to learn about services in your community. You can find your local AAA online or in the government section of your telephone directory.

Resources

- Alzheimer's Association: www.alz.org
- Eldercare Locator: <https://eldercare.acl.gov>
- Office on Women's Health: www.womenshealth.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-506-5374

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: MontanaEAP

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