

COPING WITH CAREGIVER STRESS

Definition:

A caregiver is someone who provides basic care to a person who is in need or has a chronic medical condition. A chronic condition is an illness that lasts for a long time or doesn't go away. Caregiver stress can be felt by a caregiver when they put the health and wellbeing of the person they are caring for ahead of their own (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

Signs of Caregiver Stress (Mayo Clinic, 2015)

- ♦ Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- ♦ Feeling tired most of the time
- ♦ Sleeping too much or too little
- ♦ Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- ♦ Becoming easily irritated or angry
- ♦ Losing interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- ♦ Feeling sad
- ♦ Having frequent headaches, bodily pain, or other physical problems
- ♦ Diabetes
- ♦ Heart disease, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart attack
- ♦ Heartburn
- ♦ Infection
- ♦ Obesity
- ♦ Pain, such as muscle or joint pain and headaches
- ♦ Stress and depression

Caring for another person can be difficult, and caregiver stress is very common. As a caregiver, you may feel stressed or overwhelmed trying to meet all the needs of the person you are caring for. You may find that you spend much of your time caring for others, but neglect your own health. Some of the work you do while providing care may also put extra strain on your body. All of these things can affect your emotional, mental, and physical health. Caregivers have an increased risk for the following health problems (Mayo Clinic, 2015):

- ♦ Alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse
- ♦ Anxiety disorders
- ♦ Cancer

Coping with Caregiving Stress (Help Guide [HG], 2015)

There are many different things that you can do to help to reduce the stress you experience as a caregiver and improve your overall health:

- ♦ Eat a balanced diet. This may be easier than you think because you may be sharing meals with your loved one, who will also need to eat balanced, healthy meals.
- ♦ Get plenty of rest. If you're short on sleep, take naps when your loved one does.
- ♦ Exercise. Thirty to sixty minutes of exercise four to six times a week can give you more energy, reduce stress, and improve your mood.
- ♦ Set realistic goals for both the person you are caring for and for yourself.



- ♦ Counseling. Talking to someone about what you are going through can help relieve stress; emotional health can impact your physical health.
- ♦ Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. It may seem that these substances help you feel better for a short time, but they can affect your sleep and cause health problems if you use them regularly. If you are having trouble limiting how much you drink or need help quitting smoking, talk to your family doctor.
- ♦ Visit your doctor for regular check-ups. Even if you don't think you're sick, it's still important to see your doctor regularly. Your doctor can help you stay healthy by providing preventive services, including health tests and screenings, vaccinations, and health advice appropriate for your age, sex, and medical and family history. These services help prevent disease and can aid in early detection of any medical conditions you may have.
- ♦ Take a break from caregiving. Remember that there is a limit to what you can do as a caregiver. Recognize when you feel tired or stressed out or when you are physically unable to complete a task.
- ♦ Ask for help. Plan for times when you will need help by making a list of people who are willing to assist you. This list might include family members, friends, and temporary care workers. Include phone numbers, the times people are available, and the tasks they feel most comfortable doing, and keep a copy of the list with you. You may also choose to look into community services such as in-home health care, adult day care, respite care, and meal delivery or transportation services. This information can be found at your local social service agency or Department of Public Health.

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REFERENCES

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2. Help Guide (2015). Caregiver Stress and Burnout. Retrieved July 14, 2015, from <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/caregiving-stress-and-burnout.htm>