



Caregiver News – 7/2022



Caregiver Burnout: Steps for Coping With Stress

Recognize the signs and get the help you need to reduce the toll on your body and mind

Taking care of a loved one who has dementia, physical disabilities or other age-related conditions makes demands on your time, energy and emotions – demands that, as the Cleveland Clinic warns, “can easily seem overwhelming.”

Caregiving can tax your patience and foster fatigue, frustration and guilt, becoming a grueling grind that takes a heavy toll on the caregiver’s body and mind. The effects on physical and mental health are well documented.

- Thirty-six percent of family caregivers characterized their situation as highly stressful, according to the “Caregiving in the U.S. 2020” report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC).
- Since 2015, when AARP and NAC last conducted the national survey, the proportion of caregivers describing their health as excellent or very good has dropped from 48 percent to 41 percent.
- A November 2021 study from insurance firm Genworth found that 42 percent of family caregivers experience depression, mood swings or resentment as a result of their labors. Thirty percent reported sleep deprivation, and 43 percent said caregiving responsibilities have negatively affected their relationship with a spouse or partner.

That's why it's so important to watch for signs of caregiver burnout and take proactive steps to deal with it before it spirals out of control.

Warning signs of caregiver burnout

The Alzheimer’s Association cites these 10 indicators that a caregiver may be experiencing a high level of stress.

- **Anger or frustration** toward the person you're caring for
- **Anxiety**
- **Denial** about your loved one's condition
- **Depression**
- **Exhaustion** that makes it tough to complete your daily tasks
- **Health problems**, such as getting sick more often
- **Inability to concentrate** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks or causes you to forget appointments

Causes of caregiver burnout

Along with the heavy workload and emotional demands of family caregiving, these issues also can contribute to burnout.

- **Conflicting demands** as you try to balance the needs of the care recipient, coworkers and employers, family members and yourself.
- **Lack of control** over money and resources and a lack of the skills needed to effectively manage a loved one's care.
- **Lack of privacy** because caregiving may leave you with little time to be alone.
- **Role confusion**, difficulty separating your roles as caregiver and as the parent, sibling or spouse of the care recipient.
- **Unreasonable demands** placed upon a caregiver by other family members, or the person being cared for.
- **Unrealistic expectations** about the effect caregiving efforts will have on loved ones with progressive diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

Sources: Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine



- **Irritability** and moodiness
- **Sleeplessness**
- **Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that you used to enjoy

Another tool to evaluate whether tending to a loved one is taking a toll is a caregiver self-assessment questionnaire that the American Medical Association developed and the American Psychological Association recommends.

Tips to reduce caregiver stress

Give yourself a break. Ask a friend or relative to fill in for you a few hours occasionally so you can take a walk, watch a movie or go out to dinner.

If you don't have that sort of informal support available or feel you need more structured respite care, look into other options through the National Respite Locator. This online service provided by the nonprofit Access to Respite Care and Help National Respite Network can help you find adult day care centers and home care services in your area.

Simplify your communication. Keeping extended family and friends up to date about your loved one's situation through phone calls or individual emails can be tiring, and you may not want to broadcast that information on social media.

Try using a website like CaringBridge, PostHope or MyLife Line that allows you to post updates for everyone simultaneously with control to protect your loved one's privacy.

Tap into online resources. The U.S. government's Eldercare Locator can connect you with your local Area Agency on Aging, which can guide you to resources in your community to help you deal with the challenges you are facing.

You also can call the Eldercare Locator at 800-677-1116.

With the Community Resource Finder, an online database from AARP and the Alzheimer's Association, you can find a range of programs and services in your area, from elder law attorneys to transportation. The Family Caregiver Alliance's Family Care Navigator can help you locate local resources, too.

Join a support group. If you feel like you're alone in your struggle, talking with other family caregivers can lift your spirits and help you think through solutions to various problems.

You may be able to find a support group through a local church or hospital, or at the website of the Well Spouse Association, which coordinates a national network of groups for spousal caregivers.

If you're taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, the Alzheimer's Association offers a locator for support groups in your area. AARP has an online caregiving forum and a Facebook discussion group where caregivers can share information and advice, and the Family Caregiver Alliance operates an online support group that communicates via email.

Nurture positive relationships. You may be overwhelmed, but take the time to talk with your closest friends and family members.

Spend an evening with someone who is a good listener. Limit your interactions with negative people who will drag down your mood and perspective.

Take care of your own health. Set a goal to establish a good sleep routine and to exercise a certain number of hours every week.

Be sure to eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water. See your doctor for recommended immunizations and screenings.

Tell your physician that you're a caregiver and bring up any concerns you may have. A daily relaxation and meditation practice can be beneficial as well.

Editors note: This article, published on Oct. 21, 2019, has been updated with more recent research findings on caregiver stress.

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2019/caregiver-stress-burnout.html>

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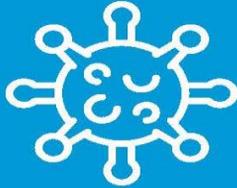
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1

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2

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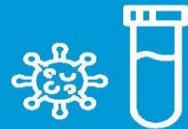
Scrub hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds.



4

Get Tested

Even if you have no symptoms, testing helps stop the spread.



www.ct.gov/coronavirus



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Sally Huck: SHuck@seniorresourcesec.org or 860 887-3561 x 126.

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