

## Caregiver Stress and How to Manage

### In this Article

- What qualifies as a caregiver and **what caregivers need to know** about their loved ones
- **Coping mechanisms and tools**
- Problem solving questions to help **determine your role in a situation**
- Mantras for **caregiver self-care**

### What is Caregiver Stress?

**Caregiver stress is** the stress that occurs from caretaking of another person.

The caregiver may tend to center his/her life on what the other person needs and lose sight of his/her own needs, **thus becoming resentful or burned out. The caregiver may become depressed, anxious, experience insomnia, fatigue and other physical symptoms.**

### Am I a Caregiver?

- Do you spend a minimum of **15 hours a week caring for or arranging care** for a friend or family member?
- Are you the **primary source of transportation** for another?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you are indeed a 'caregiver.'

Caregivers often experience **physical and emotional fatigue** related to these responsibilities. Additionally, their **personal, family and/or work-related responsibilities suffer** as well.

### What Does a Caregiver Look Like?

People ages 18-49 provide over 50% of the informal care needed for a loved one.

The average length of a caregiver's role is 4.6 years and longer if caring for a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Caregivers must negotiate through unfamiliar areas (medical, legal, and financial).

Caregivers are themselves at greater risk for physical, psychological and emotional issues.

Caregivers are less likely to ask others for assistance resulting in health care costs that are 8% higher than non-caregivers (\$13.4 billion/year).

Over 70% of caregivers make changes to their job resulting in \$25 billion in lost workplace productivity.

4-5% of caregivers refuse promotions and between 6-12% must retire early.

### Community Impact

According to a 2011 MetLife study on caregiving, an estimated 10 million caregivers, over the age of 50, lost \$3 trillion in wages. The average female caregiver loses \$242,293 in wages, \$131,251 in lost Social Security benefits, and \$50,000 in lost pension income. 70% of caregivers who are in the workforce were required to make some alteration to their work schedule. According to a Gallup Survey, this results in over \$25 billion in lost workplace productivity.

Given that caregivers typically place the health of their loved one above their own needs, their health care costs are also 8% higher than non-caregivers resulting in a cost to businesses of over \$13 billion per year.

### You Are Not Alone

There is help out there, you do need to reach out, research, and find help. Gather a team of friends or family to be your support system - **just because you are asking for help does not mean you are incapable, or that you are a burden to others.** Remember to look at community resources, such as support groups, Church volunteers, and local nursing homes for a caregiver respite weekend. LIFE's Memory Cafés are excellent ways to connect and find others in the same situation as yourself.

- Counseling
- Support Groups
- Churches
- Local Agencies
- Friends
- Family
- Books

### Organizing Care Means Pulling Together as a Team

There is no time for egos or martyrs. If you are not the sole caregiver for your loved one, do your best to get on the same page with the others who will be helping, while also balancing your needs and their needs. Don't allow one person to shoulder it all alone just because they repeatedly offer. Caregiving can be hard enough when you're not at odds with the other people on your team.

It may not be easy and you may have to find clever ways to get there but **your life will be so much easier if you really are a team.**

### Consider Things You Need to Know

- Banking info, Passwords, insurance information
- Power of Attorney for Health and Financial
- Obtain access to be a spokes person on accounts
- Ask about Wills and Wishes
- Military History and information
- Consult an Elder Law Attorney

### Coping Mechanisms

Start early - before things get bad for your loved one - and find a method that helps you cope with the way this situation will affect YOU.

Remember, **you are no good to your loved one if you aren't able to keep up.**

It's **OK to admit that you need help.**

Your goal right now needs to be doing whatever you can do to deal with this process.

### Know What Medications Help your Loved One and Use Them

For each of the following, make sure you and your team knows when your loved one has needed a medication in the past and what caused the need?

- Pain Medication and History
- Anti-anxiety Medication
- Anti-depressant Medication
- Medications to slow decline

**A behavior isn't a problem, it's a message.**

### Helpful Technology

To make your life as easy as possible while also caring for your loved one, consider using available **meal services for meal prep**. Stay connected with apps like FaceTime, Facebook, Google Meet, or Zoom. Keep track of your loved ones whereabouts with wandering devices, Phone Trackers, [Project Life Saver](#). Use timers, cell phone alarms, alarm clocks, or Google Calendar reminders for medication reminders. And have a **detailed and routinely updated Disaster Plan for emergencies.**

## It's OK

Laugh out loud at mistakes and silly moments.

Forgive yourself for mistakes and disappointing results.

Find the "so what" moments and think: "what does this moment/instance really matter in the grand scheme of things?"

Apologize to yourself and others.

Smile as often as you can.

## Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask First

Make time for the simple pleasures in life.

**Don't give up on you.**

Take care of yourself.

**It's OK to be human.**

## We Talk to Our Self More Than Anyone Else - Don't Be Mean to Yourself

It's normal to feel the following, but also important to recognize when you're talking to yourself unfairly.

- Guilt: Never able to do enough, letting the loved one down, short tempered, angry, frustrated.
- Negative self-talk - "I should have been able to do this better"
- Not taking time for self-care.
- Comparing self to others.
- Not asking for help/feeling inadequate.

Take a moment for you.

## Problem Solving Steps

Who's problem is it? Is it really your problem, or is someone trying to make it your problem?

What is the problem?

What gets attention first? What is urgent, versus what is important?

What are the possible solutions?

How will a solution be carried out?

Is the solution working? If not, what are the other options?

### Some Mantras for Caregivers

- I can!
- I am my own superhero
- Tomorrow is another day
- I am in charge of how I feel today and today I choose happiness
- I will accept the things I cannot change
- I am enough
- I am whole
- I will look for the good in every day
- **Life does not have to be perfect to be wonderful**
- **I have much to celebrate**
- **I believe I can be kinder to myself**