

Recognize Caregiver Burnout

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Providing care for an aging or disabled loved one is probably one of the hardest jobs you will ever do. Assisting with daily cares such as dressing, grooming, bathing, and walking is physically challenging. Maneuvering through the maze of medical and social services can be trying and time-consuming. Watching your loved one's ability to care for themselves deteriorate is emotionally difficult. And the changes in your own personal, social, and work life as a result of your caregiving obligations may leave you feeling confused, unhappy, and frustrated. These stresses can pile up on even the strongest of individuals and negatively impact your physical and mental health.

It is important to recognize when the challenges go beyond your ability to manage and into what is often called caregiver burnout which is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. Stressed caregivers may experience fatigue, anxiety, and depression. Learning to identify the warning signs of burnout and learn interventions to reduce stress levels will help make your caregiving role more manageable and enjoyable. Here are some warning signs of Caregiver Burnout:

- Being on the verge of tears or crying a lot
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Overreacting to minor nuisances
- Feeling constantly exhausted
- Losing interest in or having decreased productivity from work
- Withdrawing from social contacts
- Increasing use of alcohol or stimulants
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Inability to relax
- Scattered thinking
- Feeling increasingly resentful
- Being short-tempered with care recipient frequently
- Increasing thoughts of death

You may not always recognize the signs of burnout in yourself, but those close to you probably will. Be open to feedback from your friends and family about how you appear to be coping. Then heed the warnings to counteract burnout. Once you have recognized that you are experiencing burnout you can try various things to help you cope. Here are some suggestions:

- Ask others for help. You don't have to do everything. It's okay to ask for help.
- Get support. Find family and friends whom you can share joys and frustrations with.
- Attend a support group to receive positive feedback and coping strategies from others in similar situations. Consider seeking professional counseling if needed.
- Take regular breaks, even if it is only 15 or 20 minutes while your loved one is sleeping or engaged in something else, do something that makes you feel good.
- Maintain good health by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet.
- Take regular time out for journaling, meditating or contemplation.
- Stay involved in hobbies and activities you enjoy. Find a home care provider or ask family or friends to stay with your loved one if necessary.

When you understand and acknowledge that being a caregiver may leave you feeling stressed and anxious you are better able to protect yourself against caregiver burnout. The most important thing you can do prevent burnout and be an effective caregiver is to take care of yourself!

- For more information on Caregiver Burnout and other caregiver issues, please you're your local ADRC.

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