

# Managing Caregiver STRESS!

## Home Caregivers and Motivation

Caregivers are spouses, relatives, or friends who provide daily care for persons who have physical or mental health problems. As a caregiver, you will care for people with all kinds of diseases and disabilities.

Caregivers are special. While caregiving can be satisfying, it can also be stressful and demanding. Caregivers take on the task because they love the patient, are the only person who can help, or because they feel obligated.

## Caregiver Stresses

There are many stresses you face as a caregiver. These include giving comfort, overcoming physical challenges, and being “on the job” 24 hours a day. Caregiving is physically and emotionally exhausting.

There are many caregiving activities, including giving injections and medications, providing support to the medical team, and assisting with toileting, bathing, dressing, and feeding. You may be responsible for cooking, doctors’ appointments, and even maintaining the home. Because of the workload, stress and burnout are serious problems.

## What Caregivers Must Understand

A caregiver must understand that his or her mental and physical needs are inseparable. Stress affects your physical health. You need emotional support and periodic relief from your responsibilities.

## Support for Caregivers

Family and friends are crucial sources of help. The first step is to tell friends and family that help is needed. Keep a list of errands and needed services. When someone offers to help, give a specific, time-limited task. This is more effective than asking someone to “stop by” when they have a moment.

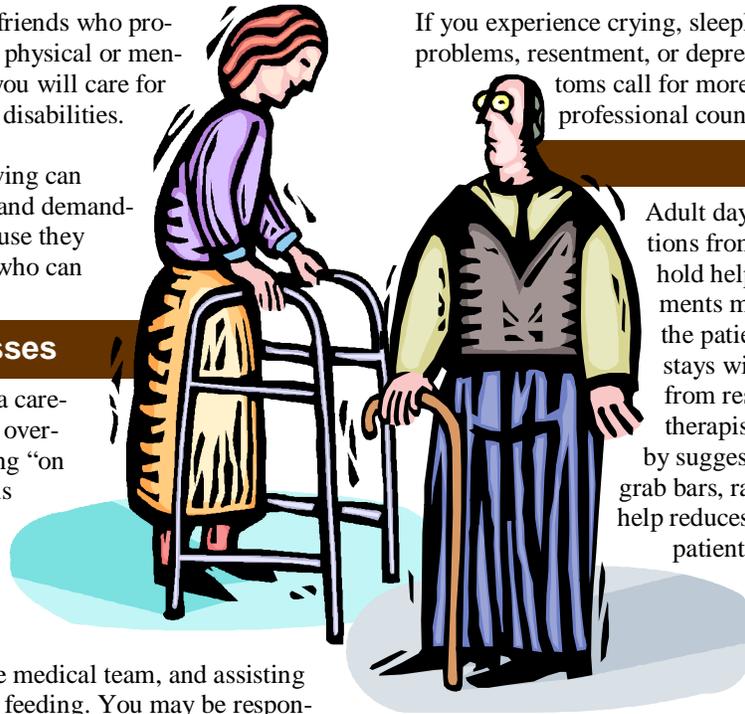
Call to request support from a religious or support group or local service agency.

Some sources of support:

The National Family Caregivers’ Association at <http://www.caregiver.com/>. It publishes “Today’s Caregiver Magazine” and provides links to government and nonprofit resources.

ARCH National Respite Locator Service, Log on to: <http://www.respitelocator.org/>. It provides information about respite services.

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal concern or medical condition.



## When a Caregiver Needs Help

If you experience crying, sleeplessness, moodiness, anger, medical problems, resentment, or depression, you need help. These symptoms call for more assistance, respite, and help from a professional counselor.

## What Works?

Adult day programs or respite care, suggestions from an occupational therapist, household help, and help with doctor’s appointments make caregiving less stressful. When the patient attends an adult day program or stays with a respite caregiver, you get relief from responsibilities. An occupational therapist can ease physical demands on you by suggesting home adaptations, such as lifts, grab bars, ramps, wheelchairs, etc. Household help reduces the workload. If friends take the patient to doctors’ appointments, you’ll be able to get some rest or personal time.

You must take care of your physical health. It’s important to get seven hours of sleep a night, eat a balanced diet, and exercise.

## What Doesn’t Work

What doesn’t work is trying to do everything without help! This leads to burnout. The best way to avoid burnout is to get practical and emotional support. Ask for help!

## Counseling

Emotional stress occurs when you feel worried, “trapped,” angry, and guilty. Feeling trapped is relieved by increasing social relationships with others and finding time to pursue your own interests and activities. A professional counselor can offer valuable direction, “reality checks”, and help you discover balance or relief.

## Tips for Managing Stress

- Draw on the resources and help of friends, family, and the community.
- Continue enjoyable activities.
- Become knowledgeable about the patient, resources, and the illness.
- Take care of your own health.
- Get recommendations from doctors and therapists regarding treatments, medications, and home adaptations.
- Develop awareness of emotions and needs; join a support group.
- Consult a therapist. Seek guidance of mental health professionals who specialize in caregiver stress. It is a growing field.

Caring for a loved one can be satisfying; it can also be stressful. Follow these recommendations to manage and relieve your caregiver stress.