

Avoiding the Caregiver Burnout

Do I Have Caregiver Burnout?

As a caregiver, the demands of tending to the needs of your loved one can often lead one to become burned out and overwhelmed. This list shows some signs and symptoms of burnout and feelings of being overwhelmed that you may begin to notice.

What are the signs?

If you are noticing these signs and symptoms, it is advisable that you seek medical and professional treatment.

- Feeling of being depressed or sadness
- Inability to sleep or sleeping too much
- Stomach and GI Issues
- Chronic headaches
- Lack of empathy for loved one, situations or self
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Chronic illness, viral or bacterial
- Frequent fighting and arguing with friends, family members and co-workers
- Tardiness for appointments, work schedules or scheduled tasks
- Continued frustration and the inability to manage it
- Unrealistic anger and inability to properly direct anger
- Trouble with maintaining relationships
- Frustration and inability to communicate in constructive manners
- Exhausted and lacking energy
- Feelings of doom and despair
- Always viewing situations with negativity and limited senses
- Stop enjoying social situations
- Wanting to stay home and not do anything other than care for loved one
- Viewing your situation as hopeless, forced or never changing
- Inability to laugh, smile or enjoy your life
- Change in eating habits. Overeating or not wanting to eat

How Can I Prevent Caregiver Burnout?

As a caregiver, it is important that you make every attempt to avoid burnout. Here is a list of ways in which you can help to avoid burnout. Remember, the prevention of burnout begins with you! You need to take good care of yourself in order to take great care of your loved one.

- Be willing to ask for help from family and friends.
- Learn to accept help when it is offered. If the help is not something you can use today, consider what else the person could do for you to make your situation more manageable.

Do not be afraid to ask someone if they are willing to do something else for you. Chances are if they were willing to offer their time to do one thing, they will be more than happy to do something else for you and your loved one.

- Do not miss any of your own medical appointments or scheduled medical testing appointments. Your health is just as important as that of your loved one.
- Eat three to six nutritional meals a day. Make sure you are eating healthy and well balanced meals.
- Get 6 to 8 hours of sleep daily.
- When appropriate, take a few moments to just lay down or sit in a chair and rest. This break can serve to relax and rest your mind, body and spirit.
- Maintain a doctor approved exercise regime.
- Stay properly hydrated-drink 6 to 8 glasses of water. Keeping your body hydrated will help to keep it healthy and in turn will keep you healthy.
- Take a daily break from caregiving tasks, even if it means you just read ten pages from your favorite book, take a quick hot bath, or walk around the block. Mini breaks can rejuvenate your mind and keep your mental health focused on the positive.
- Journal and write daily inspirational notes to yourself about your progress as a caregiver. On the days you are experiencing obstacles, journal your feelings and how you can problem solve the situation. Reward yourself for making it through a difficult day by doing something special for yourself.
- Set routines that are attainable and realistic. Routines can help a caregiver to stay organized. When you are forced to go off of your schedule be flexible and know that you will return to the schedule soon.
- Allow yourself to go on a vacation without your loved one so you can relax and enjoy the time away. Arrange for a trustworthy family member, friend or assisted living facility to care for your loved one in your absence. You will come back feeling so refreshed and rejuvenated.
- Maintain contact with friends and continue to go out in social situations. This will help to keep you from feeling isolated

Taking a Break from Care Giving

As a caregiver, it is mandatory that you remember to take frequent breaks away from your loved one. This can be difficult and may come with feelings of guilt and fear. At first, you may struggle with the concern that your loved one is not being cared for properly because you are not there to oversee the type of care that you normally provide. You may worry that in your absence,

your loved one may become sicker, need medical attention or miss you. These are all very normal feelings and if you plan accordingly for your time away, your concerns can all be dealt with in a logical manner

Rest and renewal tips for caregivers

- Stop worrying about having a perfectly clean home and enjoy spending more time caring for your needs.
- Ask a trustworthy family member, friend or home healthcare aide to come on a regular basis to care for your loved one while you get out.
- Locate a licensed and trustworthy adult day care program that you can drop your loved one off at while you spend time away.
- Take a vacation without feeling guilty and have your loved one stay at an assisted living facility or with family members.
- Ask someone you trust to come over daily, weekly or monthly to assist you with caregiving tasks while you get away, take a break or even enjoy one of your hobbies.
- Make the most of the time away that you have and do not spend it feeling guilty. Enjoy your time away from your loved one and know you will be a better caregiver because you are taking care of yourself!

I Can Do Everything!

So many caregivers think that they can do everything for their loved one, tend to the house, work, manage the financial responsibilities, cook, and even be a health care advocate. As caregiver you will need to wear so many hats that when the opportunity for you to share some of the roles you have taken on appears, it is advisable that you take it.

Here is a short list of some of the responsibilities you can seek assistance with for your loved one:

- Ask a family member or friend to help with the grocery shopping.
- Allow others to assist with lawn care and yard maintenance.
- Assign a family member or trustworthy friend banking tasks.
- Hire a high school or college student to come weekly to clean the house. This can be a less expensive alternative to hiring a cleaning service.
- Make an arrangement with a neighbor to have them take out your trash and recyclables weekly.
- Call a local college and ask if a student in the nursing program would be interested in coming over daily for an hour or two to interact with your loved one, providing you with the opportunity to take a break or do other household tasks.
- Request that family members prepare one meal a week for your family in an effort to assist you in having more to be a caregiver to your love.
- When appropriate, alternate who takes your loved one to their medical appointments, freeing up your time.
- Accept offers from family, friends and neighbors when they offer help of time, services or emotional support. If you say no, let them know it is only a no for today and that you will need their help another day. Allowing others to provide help is not a sign of

weakness, rather it is a sign of strength and courage. Know you cannot be an effective caregiver without emotional and physical support of others.

Final Thoughts

Robert Louis Stevens was quoted as saying, “Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant.” As a caregiver you will plant many seeds every day and some will grow quickly while others will grow slower. Know that the love and care you are providing your loved one is immeasurable and invaluable. You are a precious commodity and one that makes the life of your loved one so much better.

There will be obstacles that you will need to overcome, possibly you will be faced with them daily, weekly or even monthly. These cannot be avoided. Look at these as challenges and do not fear them. You cannot control the situation you have been placed into nor should you. By controlling everything you will miss so many special moments because your energy will be going in directions it need not be.

Allow yourself to feel and experience this role on a daily basis. If one day you are finding it difficult to be a caregiver, know tomorrow is a new day. Go to bed, forgiving yourself and wake up the next day celebrating the fact that you have a new day that filled with new possibilities. Remember to laugh EVERY day! Laughter is so critical to the caregiving process, as odd as that may sound right now. You may ask, “What is possibly funny about sickness, all of this upheaval and all of the changes my life is facing?” Well, that is the part you will need to search for. Look for laughter in your routine, your tasks and your life. Find reasons to smile and to be thankful for. This healthy and positive attitude will keep your mind and spirit stronger and in turn you will be a better caregiver.

Life is a long journey and what you are facing today is only part of that incredible experience. Embrace your role, make a pact with yourself to learn everything you can about it and in the end, enjoy your successes and understand and accept your failures.

Being frustrated, angry, resentful and negative, takes so much energy and you won’t have that much extra to give to these types of emotion. When you are happy you will feel more energy, more focused and more in control.