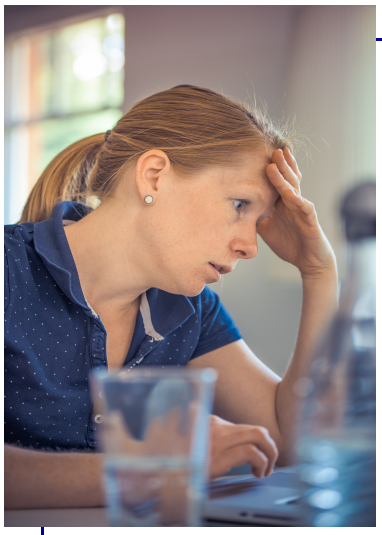


Are You a Caregiver Experiencing Burnout?

Caregiver Burnout occurs when caregivers try to do more than able, and don't get help when needed. A caregiver may begin to feel guilty if she spends time on herself rather than on the person/people she cares for, or even deny that she needs help. "Burned out" Caregivers may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, depression, complete exhaustion or a change of attitude, from positive & caring to negative & unconcerned. The most common signs of Caregiver Burnout include:

- Lack of energy
- Overwhelming fatigue
- Sleep problems (too much or too little)
- Changes in eating habits; weight loss or gain
- Withdrawing from, or losing interest in, activities you once enjoyed
- Neglecting your own physical and emotional needs
- Feeling like care-giving is controlling your life
- Feeling impatient, irritable or argumentative with the person you're caring for, or others
- Resentment towards the person you are caring for or towards yourself
- Anxiety about the future
- Depression or mood swings
- A feeling of hopelessness
- Difficulty coping with every day or unexpected circumstances
- Headaches, stomachaches, and other physical problems
- Decreased resistance to infections

Care-giving is a demanding and stressful role! You may feel like you have little or no control or that you're in over your head. Many caregivers don't have the help they need, and others try to do much more than what's realistic — physically, emotionally or financially.

Part of what pushes a caregiver to the point of burnout is the misconception that care-giving duties should consume your life. The irony is that regular rest, relaxation, and recharging your batteries through self-care, will help you be a better caregiver with improved patience, more clarity, and a more positive approach to people and the challenges that come up.

The good news is that you can learn how to give yourself better care: how to reduce overwhelm, have more energy & transform stress into resilience. The key is committing to yourself a little bit each day. It takes time to fall into bad self-care habits-and it will take time to create new ones.

Below are some action steps you can take right away to help minimize the effects of stress and burnout. (Try one or two at a time and see which ones work best for you.)



- **Become Aware:** Be aware of how stress feels to you and what people or situations cause you to feel that way. For example: you may feel stressed by grocery shopping with your spouse or by waiting in a doctor's office. Once you know what is a stress trigger, you can begin to make a plan for yourself to either cope with it or avoid it altogether.
- **Become Physically Active**: Even 10 - 15 minutes of physical activity, a couple times a day can do wonders to relieve stress and give you a fresh perspective. This can be with or without the person you care for, and any kind of exercise/movement will naturally produce stress-relieving hormones in your body and improves your overall health. Examples: Walking your dog, walking around your yard to pick up twigs, weeds or debris, garden check, organizing a closet, putting on music and dancing, taking stairs instead of elevator, or joining a class if it works with your schedule. It doesn't have to be "official" exercise. . I personally love to walk outside, weather permitting, but my second choice is dancing. Work to find simple ways to get up & move around more.
- **Nutrition & Hydration:** Eat whole, natural and unprocessed foods: Clean proteins, (meat, poultry, fish,) Healthy fats, (avocados, avocado oil, olive oil, grass-fed butter), fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, and some nuts/seeds AND drink plenty of fresh, filtered water. A Vitamin supplement can be helpful in ensuring you are getting all the daily nutrients you need. Avoid anything that is pre-packaged, (Rice-A Roni or any boxed meals) and chemical additives. Remembering to hydrate and eat properly each day can help reduce your stress, lower your risk for illnesses, help stabilize energy & improve your mood.
- **Improve Sleep Habits:** Our bodies and our brains need sleep. During sleep, our brains "flush" themselves out when the flow of cerebrospinal fluid in the brain increases, washing away harmful toxins and waste proteins that build up while we are awake. For optimal function, and to shake that "foggy" feeling, aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night. During the day, a quick 10-15-minute nap can help you feel energized and alert again. To make your nighttime sleep more effective, practice good "sleep hygiene," such as avoiding using computers, TV and smartphones before bed. Be sure to adjust temperature and darken room before bed.
- **Notice & Acknowledge the Positives:** When you take time to notice and focus on positive moments or people in your day, your experience and outlook of that day becomes better. A journal can be a useful tool to help nurture a more positive mindset. The simple act of writing down one or two things each day that was good can do wonders in helping overcome the rough patches. Do this before bed instead of scrolling through your phone or watching TV. Every day, take a few minutes to read over what you've written. Even if the positive thing seems too insignificant ("It was a sunny day"), it's very real, it absolutely counts and it can be the one thing that starts to change your outlook and experience of life.
- **Be Gentle & Compassionate with Yourself:** This may be the most important step you can take. Guilt can weigh heavy on your mind when you are stressed and overwhelmed. You may feel you "shouldn't" go out and have some "fun" or "relax" time for yourself. This is not true! Leisure & "Self" time is the very thing that helps you be a better caregiver. Set reasonable expectations for yourself, as you would for the person you are taking care of. Be sure to stay connected with friends and family, not just online, but in real life. If you can go to church, meet up with a friend, or go to a movie, festival or other local event once a month, it will help keep you connected with other people on multiple levels. Remember, that while being a caregiver is an important piece of your life, it's not the whole pie.

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