



When Caring Becomes Too Much to Carry

Understanding & Recovering From Caregiver Burnout

For family members, partners, parents, adult children, and others who provide ongoing care or support.

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that can develop when the demands of caring for someone repeatedly exceed your available energy, time, support, or resources.

You may love the person you care for deeply and still feel overwhelmed, resentful, exhausted, lonely, or desperate for a break. Those feelings can be signals that your own needs have been pushed aside for too long.

What Can Caregiver Burnout Look Like?

■ **Physical:** constant fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, sleep changes, feeling run-down or depleted.

■ **Mental:** trouble concentrating, forgetfulness, indecision, racing thoughts, or feeling mentally overloaded.

■ **Behavioral:** skipping your own appointments, eating irregularly, giving up enjoyable activities, isolating, or relying more on unhealthy coping.

■ **Emotional:** irritability, sadness, anxiety, anger, guilt, helplessness, numbness, or feeling emotionally empty.

■ **Relationship:** resentment, impatience, withdrawing from others, conflict, or feeling that no one understands what you carry.

■ **Caregiving:** dreading caregiving tasks, feeling trapped, becoming less patient, or feeling as though nothing you do is enough.

Burnout can sound like...

"I can't keep doing this."

"There is never a break."

"Everyone needs something from me."

"I feel guilty when I take time for myself."

And it can also sound like...

"I'm just tired."

"Other people have it worse."

"I should be able to handle this."

"I'll take care of myself when things calm down."

Why Does Caregiver Burnout Happen?

■ Caregiving responsibilities that continue day after day with little recovery time

■ Interrupted or inadequate sleep

■ Little help from family, friends, community, or professional resources

■ Grief over changes in the person you care for or changes in your relationship

■ Difficulty setting boundaries or asking others to help

■ Trying to meet another person's physical, emotional, medical, or practical needs while managing your own life

■ Feeling solely responsible or believing no one else can provide care correctly

■ Financial strain, work demands, transportation, appointments, paperwork, or care coordination

■ Guilt about having needs, limits, frustration, or a life outside caregiving

■ Losing touch with your own identity, relationships, interests, health, or future

Burnout Recovery: You Need More Than 'Just Self-Care'

A bath, a walk, or a quiet cup of coffee may feel good, but caregiver burnout often requires reducing demands, increasing support, protecting recovery time, and changing the belief that you must carry everything alone.

1. Identify what is actually exhausting you

Is it hands-on care, emotional responsibility, nighttime interruptions, appointments, conflict, finances, uncertainty, or never being off duty? Name the specific load before trying to solve it.

2. Ask for concrete help

Instead of "I need help," try specific requests: "Can you stay with Dad Tuesday from 2-4?" "Can you handle groceries this week?" "Can you take Mom to this appointment?"

3. Protect non-caregiving time

Schedule time when you are not responsible for monitoring, fixing, planning, or anticipating someone else's needs. Short, reliable breaks can matter more than waiting for a perfect vacation.

4. Let 'good enough' be enough

Not every task needs to be done perfectly. Decide what is essential, what can be simplified, what can wait, and what someone else can do differently from you.

5. Care for your own body

Keep your own medical appointments. Prioritize sleep when possible, regular meals, hydration, movement, medications, and health needs. Your body is part of the caregiving system too.

6. Stay connected to yourself

Keep something that belongs to you: friendships, nature, hobbies, faith/spirituality, exercise, creativity, learning, work, quiet, or time alone. You are more than your caregiving role.

Boundaries Can Be Part of Loving Care

- "I can help with this, but I cannot do everything."
- "I need someone else to take this responsibility."
- "I can listen, but I cannot solve this for you."

- "I am not available during that time."
- "I need 30 minutes alone before we talk about this."
- "My health and appointments also need to stay on the calendar."

A boundary does not mean you do not care. A boundary identifies what you can realistically give without continually sacrificing your health, safety, or functioning.

When Guilt Shows Up

Guilt may say...	A more balanced response may be...
"Taking a break is selfish."	"Rest helps me continue caring without completely depleting myself."
"I should be able to handle this."	"This is a lot for one person. Needing support is information, not failure."
"No one can do it the way I do."	"Different does not always mean unsafe or inadequate. Sharing care may protect both of us."
"Their needs matter more than mine."	"Their needs matter, and mine matter too."

My Caregiver Burnout Reset Plan

STOP

What am I doing because I feel I 'should,' even though it is draining me?

REDUCE

What responsibility, standard, task, or frequency can become smaller?

ASK

What specific help do I need, and who can I ask?

PROTECT

What part of my health, rest, relationships, or identity needs protected time?

RESTORE

What helps me feel like myself again?

A Check-In With Me

The part of caregiving that feels hardest right now is...

I know I am reaching my limit when...

Something I need but have been afraid or reluctant to ask for is...

One responsibility I could share, simplify, or release is...

One thing that helps me feel like a person - not only a caregiver - is...

This week, one small way I will care for myself is...

When to Reach Out for More Support

Consider additional professional support when exhaustion, anxiety, sadness, anger, guilt, sleep problems, relationship strain, or loss of functioning are persistent or worsening. Your healthcare provider or therapist can help you consider emotional support, practical resources, respite options, and treatment when appropriate.

If you are worried that you may hurt yourself, the person you care for, or someone else, or you feel unable to provide care safely, seek immediate help from emergency or crisis resources in your area.

You can love someone and still need rest.

You can be committed to someone's care and still have limits. You can feel grateful and exhausted at the same time. Taking care of yourself does not take love away from the person you care for - it makes room for you to remain a person inside the caregiving role.

This handout is for education and therapeutic reflection and is not a diagnostic tool or a substitute for individualized medical or mental health care.