



Caring for a Loved One

10 Ways to Deal With Caregiver Stress

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It's no secret: Helping to care for a sick or dying loved one exacts a steep emotional toll. One study found that as many as one in three caregivers rate their stress level as high, and half say they have less time to spend with family and friends.

But when you're caring for others, it's critical that you first take care of yourself. By not doing so, you put yourself at risk of exhaustion, health problems and even total burnout.

These 10 tips will help keep your stress in check.

1. Put your physical needs first. Eat nutritious meals. Don't give in to stress-driven urges for sweets or overindulge in alcohol. Get enough shut-eye; if you have trouble sleeping at night, try napping during the day. Schedule regular medical checkups. Find time to exercise, even if it means you have to ask someone else to provide care while you work out. If you experience symptoms of depression — extreme sadness, trouble concentrating, apathy, hopelessness, thoughts about death — talk to a medical professional.

2. Connect with friends. Isolation increases stress. Getting together regularly with friends and relatives can keep negative emotions at bay.

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- [Involving Others: Family, Friends, and Community. Read](#)
- [The Secret Caregivers. Read](#)
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3. Ask for help. Make a list of things you have to do and recruit others to pitch in. Even faraway relatives and friends can manage certain tasks.

4. Call on community resources. Consider asking a geriatric care manager to coordinate all aspects of your loved one's care. Other service providers, including home health aides, homemakers and home repair services, can shoulder some of the many responsibilities of caregiving. Volunteers or staff from faith-based organizations or civic groups might visit, cook or help you with driving.

5. Take a break. You deserve it. Plus, your ailing family member might benefit from someone else's company. Think about respite care by friends, relatives or volunteers. Or try for a weekend or longer vacation by turning to a home health agency, nursing home, assisted living residence or board-and-care home; [these facilities](#) sometimes accept short-term residents. Adult day centers, which usually operate five days a week, provide care in a group setting for older people who need supervision.

6. Deal with your feelings. Bottling up your emotions takes a toll on your psyche — and even on your physical well-being. Share feelings of frustration with friends and family. Seek support from co-workers who are in a similar situation. Make an appointment with a professional counselor, or join a [caregiver support group](#).

7. Find time to relax. Doing something you enjoy, such as reading, walking or listening to music, can recharge your batteries. Some caregivers meditate or use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or visualizing a positive place. If you're religious, you might find that prayer can be a powerful tool.

8. Get organized. Simple tools like calendars and to-do lists can help you [prioritize your responsibilities](#). Always tackle the most important tasks first, and don't worry if you can't manage everything.

9. Just say no. Accept the fact that you simply can't do everything! Resist the urge to take on more activities, projects or financial obligations than you can handle. If someone asks you to do something that will stretch you too thin, explain honestly why you can't — and don't feel guilty.

10. Stay positive. Do your best to avoid negativity. Hold a family meeting to resolve conflicts with siblings and other relatives. Instead of dwelling on what you can't do, pat yourself on the back for how much you are doing, and focus on the rewards of caring for someone you love.