



Empowerment Tool for Understanding Caregiver Burnout

Caregivers are often so busy caring for others that they tend to neglect their own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily seem overwhelming, leading to fatigue and ultimately, burnout.

WHAT CAUSES CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

1. **Role confusion or reversal** – It can be difficult for a person to separate his or her role as a caregiver from being a spouse, child, friend, etc. This role reversal is not a natural or easy process, and leads to stress on both care partners.
2. **Unrealistic Expectations** - Caregivers often believe they can do it all! While that is simply not feasible, it is especially difficult when caring for someone living with progressive diseases such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's. Caregivers also expect their care will lead to a positive effect on their care partner's health and happiness. When this does not happen, caregivers can have feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.
3. **Guilt** - Caregiver guilt is constant. Not spending enough time with your loved one, or not being able to tend your own family's needs because of your caregiving responsibilities can be overwhelming. Resenting your role as a caregiver can transfer to feelings of guilt.
4. **Lack of Control** – Lack of family support, money, resources and skills often leave caregivers feeling overwhelmed. The realization that many of these circumstances are simply out of one's control can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, and depression.
5. **Denial** – Many caregivers don't recognize the signs of symptoms of caregiver burnout. Stress can quickly escalate with caregivers due to physical and emotional exhaustion.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

1. Disrupted sleep patterns
2. Altered eating patterns
3. Increased sugar or alcohol consumption
4. Frequent headaches or sudden onset of back pain
5. Increased reliance on over-the-counter pain remedies or prescribed drugs
6. Irritability, fear and anxiety
7. Impatience, especially over small issues
8. Overreacting with anger toward a spouse, child or older care recipient
9. Withdrawing from social activities
10. Loss of compassion and empathy for care recipient and others
11. Resenting your care recipient and/or the situation
12. Neglecting or mistreating your care recipient

HOW CAN I PREVENT CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

1. Caring for yourself is critically important! Set realistic goals that will help you better care for your physical health, emotional and spiritual needs. Caring for yourself will ensure better care for your loved one
2. Be open to accepting help from others – families, friend or professionals
3. Seek a support group to share your feelings with others who are going through similar situations
4. Be realistic about your loved one's illness, especially progressive diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other degenerative illness
5. Talk to a professional. Therapists, social workers and clergy are all trained to counsel individuals dealing with a wide range of emotional issues
6. Educate yourself by learning about caregiver issues, your care recipient's illness, aging issues and other matters. Education empowers caregivers and reduces stress
7. Maintain healthy eating and lifestyle habits
8. Exercise regularly
9. Practice deep breathing, yoga or other holistic techniques to help reduce stress
10. Laugh! Humor helps alleviate stress and accentuate the positive
11. Learn to say NO and not feel guilty. Caregivers can't do it all, and by setting limits and boundaries, you are caring for yourself and those you love
12. Develop tools to respond to behavioral expression, especially for those living with dementia. Touch, music, pets, nature and reminiscence are all proven therapies that have tremendous benefit for both care partners