

## Caregiver Stress

Caregiver stress is the emotional strain created by having to care for another person. Studies show that caregiving takes a toll on physical and emotional health. Caregivers are more likely to suffer from depression than their peers. Limited research suggests that caregivers may also be more likely to have health problems like diabetes and heart disease than non-caregivers.

### Causes of Caregiver Stress

Caring for another person takes a lot of time, effort, and work. Plus, most caregivers juggle caregiving with full-time jobs and parenting. In the process, caregivers put their own needs aside. Caregivers often report that it is difficult to look after their own health in terms of exercise, nutrition and doctor's visits. Many caregivers end up feeling angry, anxious, isolated and sad.

Caregivers for people with Alzheimer's disease or other kinds of dementia are particularly vulnerable to burnout. Research shows that most dementia caregivers suffer from depression and stress. Studies also show that the more hours a person spends on caregiving, the greater their risk of anxiety and depression.

Women caregivers are particularly prone to feeling stress and overwhelmed. Studies show that female caregivers have more emotional and physical health problems, employment-related problems and financial strain than male caregivers. Other research shows that people who care for their spouses are more prone to caregiving-related stress than those who care for other family members.

It is important to note that caring for another person can also create positive emotional change. Aside from feeling stress, many caregivers say their role has had many positive effects on their lives. For example, caregivers report that caregiving has given them a sense of purpose. They say that their role makes them feel useful, capable and that they are making a difference in the life of a loved one.

### Symptoms of Caregiver Stress

If you have any of the following symptoms, caregiving may be putting too much strain on you:

- Sleeping problems such as sleeping too much or too little
- Change in eating habits, often resulting in weight gain or loss
- Feeling tired or without energy most of the time
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy such as going out with friends, walking or reading
- Easily irritated, angered or saddened
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches or other physical problems

### Preventing and Relieving Caregiver Stress

Taking care of yourself is the first step in minimizing stress in your life. In the process, you will become a better caregiver. Take the following steps to make your health a priority:

- Find out about community caregiving resources.
- Ask for and accept help.
- Stay in touch with friends and family. Social activities can help you feel connected and may reduce stress.



- Find time for exercise most days of the week.
- Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine.
- Look to faith-based groups for support and help.
- Join a support group for caregivers in your situation (many support groups can be found in the community or on the Internet).
- See your doctor for a checkup and talk about symptoms of depression or sickness you may be having.
- Try to get enough sleep and rest.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains and low in saturated fat.
- Ask your doctor about taking a multivitamin.
- Take one day at a time.

Caregivers who work outside the home should consider taking some time off. If you are feeling overwhelmed, taking a break from your job may help you get back on track. Employees covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act may be able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year to care for relatives. Ask your human resources office about options for unpaid leave.

Content found on this page is from the website for the Office on Women's Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The website is located at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

©2010 ComPsych® Corporation. All rights reserved. This information is for educational purposes only. It is always important to consult with the appropriate professional on financial, medical, legal, behavioral or other issues. As you read this information, it is your responsibility to make sure that the facts and ideas apply to your situation.

