

Tips for Preventing and Dealing with Caregiver Stress



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Caring for a loved one with health problems can be rewarding. At the same time, it can be hard to meet your own needs. Giving care to someone can be hard work. It is common to feel stressed and overwhelmed at times. You may feel too busy to think about your own health, but taking care of your body gives you strength. It is important to care for yourself and your own well-being while caring for your loved one to reduce your risk for health problems.

Signs of caregiver stress

Common signs of caregiver stress include:

- Feeling sad or moody
- Feeling angry with the person you are helping
- Low energy level
- No time to yourself
- Trouble sleeping
- Not eating enough or eating too much
- Spending less time with family and friends
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Not making medical appointments

Tips to help

Here are things you can do to help reduce caregiver stress:

- Take care of yourself. Honor your needs and nurture your mind, body and spirit.
- Take care of your own health and keep good health habits, such as:
 - Get 8 hours of sleep each night.
 - Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, protein and whole grains. Limit caffeine and sugar. Drink plenty of fluids.

- ▶ Be active. Exercise can help relax tense muscles, improve your mood and help you sleep better. Try to exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day, three days a week. If able, have the person you care for walk or do stretching exercises with you. If it is hard to find the time to exercise, walk or stretch for 10 minutes inside the house.
- ▶ Make time for rest and relaxation. Doing something for yourself each day, even for a few minutes, will help you be a better caregiver.
- Ask for help.
 - ▶ Ask others to be on your caregiving team.
 - ▶ When someone says, “Let me know how I can help” be ready to tell them what you need. These may include tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, yard work and child care.
 - ▶ Seek support and tips from other caregivers.
- Learn new ways to deal with stress.
 - ▶ Try relaxation exercises, meditation, yoga or other methods to help with stress.
 - ▶ Focus on your strengths and remind yourself that you are doing the best you can.
 - ▶ Recognize your successes. Try to accept things that you cannot change.
 - ▶ Break a challenge into smaller parts. Take one thing at a time.
 - ▶ Learn about your loved one’s health issues and how to best communicate with the health care team.

Understanding your feelings

- ▶ You may find it helpful to talk with a counselor about your feelings and to learn ways to deal with difficult situations. The counselor can also provide information on resources in the community for caregivers.
- ▶ Talk openly with family and friends about your feelings.
- ▶ Try to improve your self-care and ask others to help you.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.