Caregiver Stress

Caregiving Causes Stress

Taking care of a person who has dementia can be stressful. As the person loses memory and can't take care of themselves, it becomes harder for you to take care of them. It's even harder if they don't make sense when they talk, or if they can't talk at all.

Caregivers often feel frustrated or angry. Sometimes they resent the person they are taking care of, and that can make them feel guilty or sad. They often feel lonely and isolated. It's normal to feel these things, and we all feel them in different ways. Many caregivers feel all of these things at once.

Too much stress can take a toll on your health. It can also decrease your ability to care for the person with dementia. Be alert for signs of caregiver stress. Here are the signs:

10 Common Signs of Caregiver Stress	
Denial	Feeling stressed out but telling yourself you are not.
Anger	Getting angry at the person with dementia, or at anyone or anything.
Isolation	Feeling alone. Not seeing friends or family.
Anxiety	Worried all the time, even when you shouldn't be worried.
Depression	Feeling sad or hopeless; crying.
Exhaustion	Feeling so tired that it seems hard to go on.
Sleep problems	Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.
Irritability	Finding that everything bothers you.
Concentration	Can't keep focused on what you need to do.
Health problems	Having new or worse medical problems.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and promotoras care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. The information in the series offers general advice and does not distinguish between the different types of dementia.

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Care Partner Information

Many caregivers don't take care of their own health and well being. But, the most important gift you can give to the person you are caring for is to assure you are taking of yourself. You will be a better caregiver if you do.   If you are feeling the signs of stress, here's what you can do.

Tips for Managing Stress

- **Take care of yourself**.

    Get some rest. Find time to exercise even a little. Eat healthy. Take time for yourself. Don't forget to make, and keep, your own doctors' appointments.

- **Ask for help**.

    You can't do it alone. You are not failing if you ask friends and family for help.

- **Get to know and use local resources**.

    Find out about adult day care, in-home help, respite care, and other community resources. They can help when you need a break. Contact the Alzheimer's Association.

- **Become an educated caregiver**.

    As the dementia gets worse, you need to learn news skills to take care of the person. Look for skills training classes you can take.

- **Find ways to connect with others**

    Check out caregiver support groups. Participate in your faith community or social clubs.

- **Try relaxation techniques**.

    Ask your doctor about ways to reduce stress that might work for you.

- **Don't take it personally.**

    People with dementia cannot help the way they behave. They are not getting you upset on purpose. It's not their fault. It's not your fault.

- **Enjoy it when you can**.

    Focus on a positive. Enjoy being with the person whenever you can.

- **Give yourself credit, not guilt**.

    You are doing the best you can. The person with dementia needs you and you are there. Make sure you are taking care of yourself, too.

Useful Websites About Caregiver Stress
Alzheimer's Association
   http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-caregiver-stress-burnout.asp
National Institute on Aging
   http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/relieving-stress-anxiety-resources-alzheimers-caregivers

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