

Family Fact Sheet

Caregiving: Caregiver Burnout and Stress Management (Part 4 of 4) **Andrew B. Crocker – Gerontology Health Specialist**



Caregivers invest so much time and effort into the lives of their care recipients that they often neglect themselves.

Feelings of guilt and a sense of helplessness may cause significant stress in the life of a caregiver causing an inability to function properly. When caregiver

burnout occurs, the caregiver is not the only person who suffers – the care recipient may also be affected. This article will provide some strategies to help identify and manage stress in an effort to prevent caregiver burnout.

You cannot begin to resolve the stress in your life until you realize that you are affected by it. The following questions may help you identify some warning signs of stress:

- Do you feel lacking in energy?
- Do you feel increasingly isolated?
- Are you having increased health problems: high blood pressure or ulcers?
- Are you having trouble sleeping?
- Are you having trouble concentrating?

In order to address your stress and find a coping strategy, you must be able to identify its cause. What creates stress for you may not create stress for

another person. Some questions to help you identify the cause of your stress are listed below:

- Are there too many demands on your time, energy or money?
- Do you have difficulty meeting your care recipient's needs?
- Do you feel trapped?
- Do you feel that other members of your care team are not doing their part?
- Are your expectations for caregiving unrealistic?

As mentioned earlier, the coping strategy you choose may depend on what type stress is affecting your life. You may be able to find one coping strategy to manage your stress but more than likely it will take a combination of several ideas to help you. Whatever you do, do not get to the end of your rope. You owe it to yourself and to your care recipient to make an effort to provide the best care that you can:

- Share Concerns – Within reason, involve your care recipient in making decisions that affect him or her.
- Rest – Lack of rest may lead to decreased patience and tolerance. It also negatively impacts your health.
- Solve Problems – Some needs simply cannot be addressed. Change the things that you are able to change and try not to worry about the rest.
- Use Common Sense – Be flexible and adapt to different situations. In the end, you know what is best for you.
- Ask For Help – Do not assume you have to do this alone. Rely on your care network to help you.

This list of coping strategies is certainly not exhaustive. Always remember that there are alternative solutions – they just have to be found. Sadly, caregiver burnout leads to many alternative housing placements, sometimes prematurely, simply because there are no other alternatives. Caregivers have quite an awesome responsibility to another person! Remember to keep realistic

expectations about your abilities and about the condition of your care recipient. This will make large strides in helping you to cope with the stress that caregiving may bring.

Additional resources for caregiving may be found on the web, in print or in person:

- Texas Cooperative Extension
 - <http://fcs.tamu.edu/aging/caregiversupport.htm>
 - <http://tcebookstore.org> (Publication # B-6006)
- Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
 - 1.800.252.9240 (In Texas)
 - <http://www.tdoa.state.tx.us/Services/AAALocatorMap.htm>
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
 - <http://www.aarp.org/life/caregiving>