Managing Caregiver Stress

Home Caregivers & Motivation
Caregivers are spouses, relatives, or friends who provide daily care for persons who have physical or mental health problems. As a caregiver, you may care for someone with any combination of conditions and/or disabilities.

While caregiving can be satisfying, it can also be stressful and demanding. Caregivers take on the task because they love the patient, are the only person who can help, or because they feel obligated.

Caregiver Stresses
There are many stresses you may face as a caregiver. These include giving comfort, overcoming physical challenges, and being “on the job” 24 hours a day. Caregiving is physically and emotionally exhausting. There are many caregiving activities, including administering medications, providing support to the medical team, and assisting with toileting, bathing, dressing, and feeding. You may be responsible for cooking, doctors’ appointments, and even maintaining the home. Because of the workload, stress and burnout are serious problems.

What Caregivers Must Understand
As caregiver, you must acknowledge that your mental and physical needs are inseparable. Stress affects your physical health. You need emotional support and periodic relief from your responsibilities.

Support For Caregivers
Family and friends are crucial sources of help. The first step is to tell friends and family that help is needed. Keep a list of errands and needed services. When someone offers to help, give a specific, time-limited task. This is more effective than asking someone to “stop by” when they have a moment.

You may also call to request support from a religious or community support group or local service agency.

Some sources of support:

ARCH National Respite Locator Service, Log on to: https://archrespite.org. It provides information about respite services.

When A Caregiver Needs Help
If you experience crying, sleeplessness, moodiness, anger, medical problems, resentment, or depression, you need help. These symptoms call for more assistance, respite, and help from a professional counselor.

What Works
Adult day programs or respite care, suggestions from an occupational therapist, household help, and help with doctor’s appointments make caregiving less stressful. When the patient attends an adult day program or stays with a respite caregiver, you get relief from responsibilities. An occupational therapist can ease physical demands on you by suggesting home adaptations, such as lifts, grab bars, ramps, wheelchairs, etc. Household help reduces the workload. If friends take the patient to doctors’ appointments, you’ll be able to get some rest or personal time. You must take care of your physical and emotional health. It’s important to get seven hours of sleep a night, eat a balanced diet, and exercise.

What Doesn’t Work
What doesn’t work is trying to do everything without help! This leads to burnout. The best way to avoid burnout is to get practical and emotional support. Ask for help!

Counseling
Emotional stress occurs when you feel worried, “trapped,” angry, and guilty. Feeling trapped is relieved by increasing social connections with others and finding time to pursue your own interests and activities. A professional counselor can offer valuable direction, “reality checks”, and help you discover balance or relief.

Tips For Managing Stress
• Draw on the resources and help of friends, family, and the community.
• Continue enjoyable activities.
• Become knowledgeable about the patient, resources, and the illness.
• Take care of your own health.
• Get recommendations from doctors and therapists regarding treatments, medications, and home adaptations.
• Develop awareness of emotions and needs; join a support group.
• Seek guidance an EAP counselor on managing caregiver stress.
• Call your EAP to access eldercare management resources, obtain information on eldercare planning and the eCareDiary™ online caregiver support portal.

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal concern or medical condition.