

Tips for Managing Caregiver Stress

Because the demands of caregiving can build and continue indefinitely, it's important to manage some of the pressures by taking care of yourself.

There are times when caregiver stress cannot be avoided, but it can be managed. Here are some ways to help you maintain your well-being:

- Delegate responsibilities to other family members or to service providers in the community.
- Take care of your physical health. Eat balanced meals, get adequate sleep, and exercise regularly.
- Take time for yourself. Schedule time away from your caregiving duties. Keep involved with activities that are important to you.
- Continue at least some of the social activities that you enjoy. This is not the time to lose contact with friends and family members.
- Avoid negative ways of coping with stress. Overeating, alcohol and drug misuse and directing your stress at someone else are destructive ways of dealing with your problems.
- Encourage the care-receiver to be as independent as possible. Work together to solve problems.
- Say no to projects that won't fit into your time schedule or will compromise your mental health.
- Simplify and de-clutter your life.
- Allow extra time to do things and get to places.
- Pace yourself. Spread out big changes and difficult projects over time. Don't lump the hard things all together.
- Talk less and listen more.
- Locate a support group. Caregivers need others who understand what they are experiencing and who will listen to their feelings and needs.
- Learn relaxation techniques like deep breathing or taking a mind vacation.

How you view problems or situations can make a difference as to how much stress you feel. Here are some methods to change your attitude to better manage stress:

- Stop blaming others for your problems. Accept responsibility for your actions.
- Understand that the only person you can control is YOU.
- If you can't do anything about something, work on forgetting it.
- Laugh more often and learn to be playful and have fun. Laughter has a healing influence on you and the person you are caring for.
- Develop a forgiving attitude toward yourself, the care-receiver and others. You are doing the best you can under the circumstances.
- Write down your thoughts and inspirations or keep a journal.
- Concentrate on your caregiving accomplishments rather than dwelling on your perceived shortcomings. Even if the care-receiver doesn't express his/her appreciation, pat yourself on the back daily to acknowledge your own strengths and achievements.