

Preventing Caregiver Burnout

As the caregiver for your loved one, much of the responsibility for their care, if not all, rests upon your shoulders. The high level of constant care that you provide can exact a heavy toll on your spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Over time, this can lead to burnout. By learning to recognize the signs and causes of caregiver burnout and how to take action to prevent it, you can begin to give richly to yourself and provide quality care for your loved one.

Causes of Caregiver Burnout

The responsibilities placed upon you as a primary caregiver can feel overwhelming. As a caregiver, it is easy to overlook your needs and not recognize the causes of burnout that may lead to the degradation of your spiritual, physical, and emotional health.

- **A lack of control** over finances, time, and other areas of life can be continually draining and stressful as you seek to provide the best care you can for your loved one.
- **Placing unrealistic demands and expectations upon yourself** can give rise to feelings of inadequacy, as you may feel that you are never able to complete all of your responsibilities as a caregiver.
- **Fulfilling multiple roles** as a caregiver, spouse, or child can be continually stressful and confusing. It can be difficult to separate your role as a caregiver from the other familial and professional roles in your life.

Signs of Caregiver Burnout

As you care for your loved one's needs on a daily basis, it can become commonplace to neglect yourself. The evidence of this neglect can begin to manifest itself in different ways.

- **Appetite changes** can indicate potential burnout. Whether eating too little or too much, a sudden shift in your normal appetite is a potential warning sign of caregiver burnout.

- **Experiencing frequent illness** can be an indication that the stress of caregiving is beginning to take a toll on your physical health.
- **Sleeplessness** caused by around-the-clock caregiving, constant thoughts of concern, or general restlessness can be an indication that the stress of caregiving is seeping over into your resting hours.
- **Depression** resulting from the stresses and demands of caregiving is a serious indication of emotional and spiritual burnout.
- **Desires to hurt yourself or your loved one** are clear indications that your stress is at an unhealthy level and you are burned out emotionally, mentally, and physically as a caregiver. If you feel any desire to hurt yourself or your loved one, contact your physician or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline immediately.

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Providing for your own spiritual, physical, and emotional needs is important as a caregiver. Failure to provide for yourself may lead to complete burnout, severely impacting your ability to provide care for your loved one. By recognizing the signs and understanding the causes of burnout, you can take preventative measures to ensure you are properly caring for yourself.

- **Understand that negative emotions are normal.** Caregiving can bring a great deal of frustration. Toileting, mealtime, and bedtime can all be frustrating experiences when caring for your loved one. Frustration and anger are all normal emotions to experience and do not make you a bad person or caregiver.
- **Set realistic goals.** Understand that you're only one person and that you can only accomplish so much in a day. While there may be many errands to run and chores to complete, unexpected events will occur throughout the day. When these occur, a recalibration of the day's goals can be beneficial. Being unable to complete items on your to-do list does not make you an inefficient or poor caregiver, but one who can adjust their schedule to meet their loved one's caregiving needs.

- **Set aside time for yourself.** With the stress caregiving brings, time for yourself to reduce tension and bring your mind to rest is not selfish, but a necessity. To continue to provide the highest quality of care to your loved one, you must give to yourself.
- **Ask for help.** If there is a time where the demands of caregiving are pushing you past your breaking point, reach out to others. Family members and friends, though aware of your current caregiving situation, may not reach out to you to provide help. They may feel you have it fully under control or be worried that you may not want their help. Make the realities of your situation clear to others and let them know you need their help.
- **Confide in another.** Sharing your thoughts and stresses with a close friend or family member can be helpful in preventing burnout. Sharing with someone who genuinely cares for your wellbeing can greatly aid in relieving stress.

References

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