



Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2

Caregiving Series

CAREGIVER STRESS

I can't remember the last the last time I had a day to myself.

*I try to take good care of Mom and also find time for my husband and children,
but there is not enough of me to go around.*

Stress is part of life for everyone and a certain amount of stress is useful. Without deadlines, many tasks would never get done. But if you are balancing family and work responsibilities in addition to caring for your loved one, stress can quickly reach a harmful level.

Concern about the decline of your loved one and your lack of control over what is happening can be very stressful. Another stressor may be the amount of time and energy you spend caregiving. If your loved one lives with you, you may resent your loss of privacy and the many adjustments you must make.

Your past and present relationship with your loved one will influence how stressful caregiving is for you. You can start by acknowledging your feelings. All feelings are legitimate, even those that are disturbing to you, including anger, frustration, and sadness. Your feelings have a lot to do with the way you cope with the challenges of caregiving.

Complete the following checklist to get a handle on your stress. Answer each statement with seldom true, sometimes true, often true, or usually true.

- I don't get enough rest.
- I don't have enough time to myself.
- I don't have time to be with other family members.
- I feel guilty about my situation.
- I don't get out much anymore.
- I have conflicts with the person I care for.
- I have conflicts with other family members.
- I cry or feel sad.
- I worry about money.
- I don't have enough experience or knowledge to give good care.
- I don't feel well.
- I have trouble sleeping.
- I am eating much more or much less than usual.
- I use alcohol or other drugs to cope.
- I can't concentrate at work.

If you responded usually true or often true to one or more of these statements, it is time to make some changes and reduce your level of stress.

Here are some steps you can take:

- Begin to set limits and develop realistic goals.
- Don't take on more than you can handle.
- Reduce unnecessary activities or responsibilities.
- Develop a network of family and friends to help with caregiving tasks and to give you frequent breaks. You can't do it all.
- Contact the Area Agency on Aging for information about community resources, education, and support.
- Use community resources such as adult day services, or home-delivered meals.
- Bring in a few hours of home health service to help with a bath, do the laundry, or tidy up the house.
- Do something you enjoy every day no matter how busy you are.
- Maintain a healthy life style by eating well and getting regular exercise.
- Lean on friends or other caregivers for emotional support.
- Avoid overuse of alcohol or other drugs.
- Forgive yourself if you make a mistake.

Material for *Caregiver Stress* was drawn in part from *The Caregiver's Handbook: Assisting both the Caregiver and the Elderly Care-receiver*, produced by the San Diego County Mental Health Services, San Diego, CA 92110, Robert Torres-Stanovik, LCSW, Editor, and used with permission.



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