

How to Avoid Caregiver Burnout

Caregiving for an elderly loved one can be very rewarding, even when it is hard work and causes stress. No one can be fully prepared for all of the challenges of caregiving, though. The task and responsibilities involved can be demanding. Caregiving presents physical and mental and, usually, financial challenges to the caregiver. Caregiving often involves sacrifices, restrictions, and competing responsibilities.

The many conflicts and responsibilities that come with caring for an older person can isolate a caregiver, compromise relationships, threaten job opportunities, and lead to mounting anger, frustration, guilt, anxiety, depression, stress, and a sense of helplessness and exhaustion that is sometimes called caregiver burnout.

Caregivers can do only so much as individuals, and the help they may receive from family members and friends may not be enough. *The Merck Manual of Health & Aging*¹ offers the following strategies for avoiding caregiver burnout:

- Learn about the cause, symptoms, and course of the person's condition. Anticipate changes.
- Let the older person make his own decisions and solve problems if he is able. Set limits to the amount of assistance offered if necessary.
- Avoid taking an older person's anger, frustration, or difficult behaviors personally. These behaviors may be symptoms of a disorder such as dementia.
- Avoid arguments.
- Delegate responsibilities and ask other family members and friends to help whenever possible.
- Ask for help from trustworthy family member, friends, or neighbors. Be explicit but reasonable about expectations. Avoid criticism as long as the person helping is responsible.
- Discuss feelings and experiences with others, either informally or through a support group.
- Eat and exercise regularly, and schedule regular time for relaxing, enjoyable activities.
- Obtain information about the older person's resources; avoid depleting personal finances.
- Contact organizations that can provide information and referrals for caregivers.
- Consider day care or respite care before the burden of isolation or of caregiving grows too great.
- Remember, assisted living or a nursing home may be the best option.

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