

Understanding Caregiver Burnout Empowerment Tool

Caregivers are often so busy caring for others that they neglect their own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily become overwhelming, leading to fatigue and burnout.

WHAT CAUSES CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

- 1. Role confusion or reversal** – It can be difficult for a person to separate their role as a caregiver from the role of spouse, child, friend, etc. This role reversal is not a natural or easy process and leads to stress on both care partners.
- 2. Unrealistic Expectations** - Caregivers expect their care will positively affect their care partner's health and happiness. This may be unrealistic for patients living with a progressive disease such as Alzheimer's Disease or Parkinson's Disease. This can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.
- 3. Guilt** - Caregivers may feel guilty for not spending enough time with their loved ones or not being able to tend to their own family's needs or neglecting friends. Resenting the role of caregiver can lead to feelings of guilt.
- 4. Lack of Control** – Lack of family support, money, resources, and skills often leave caregivers feeling overwhelmed. The realization that many of these circumstances are simply out of one's control can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, and depression.
- 5. Denial** – Many caregivers simply cannot see when they are experiencing burnout and eventually get to the point where they cannot function effectively. They may even become sick themselves.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT

1. Disrupted sleep patterns
2. Altered eating patterns
3. Increased food or alcohol consumption
4. Frequent headaches or sudden onset of back pain
5. Increased reliance on over-the-counter pain remedies or prescribed drugs
6. Irritability, fear, and anxiety
7. Impatience, especially over minor issues
8. Overreacting with anger toward a spouse, child, or older care recipient
9. Withdrawing from social activities
10. Loss of compassion and empathy for the care recipient and others
11. Resenting your care recipient and the situation
12. Neglecting or mistreating your care recipient

HOW CAN I PREVENT CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

1. Caring for yourself is critically important! Set realistic goals that will help you better care for your physical health, and emotional and spiritual needs. Caring for yourself will ensure better care for your loved one
2. Be open to accepting help from others – family, friends, or professionals
3. Seek a support group to share your feelings with others who are going through similar situations
4. Be realistic about your loved one's illness, especially progressive diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other degenerative illnesses
5. Talk to a professional. Therapists, social workers, and clergy are all trained to counsel individuals dealing with a wide range of emotional issues
6. Educate yourself by learning about caregiver issues, your care recipient's illness, aging issues, and other matters. Education empowers caregivers and reduces stress
7. Maintain healthy eating and lifestyle habits
8. Exercise regularly
9. Practice deep breathing, yoga, or other holistic techniques to help reduce stress
10. Laugh! Humor helps alleviate stress and accentuate the positive
11. Learn to say NO and not feel guilty. Caregivers can't do it all, and by setting limits and boundaries, you are caring for yourself and those you love
12. Develop tools to respond to behavioral expression, especially for those living with dementia. Touch, music, pets, nature, and reminiscence are all proven therapies that have tremendous benefits for both care partners.