

Caring for the Caregiver

Imagine feeling more energized and effective in your caregiving role, while also having the time and energy to enjoy other aspects of your life.

NEARLY 40%
OF ALL AMERICAN
ADULTS
are functioning
as a caregiver.

While the additional time and memories are priceless, caregiving can take a legitimate toll on your work, health, and family life.

THE CHALLENGES OF CAREGIVING

Caregivers cite work-related difficulties, such as rearranging schedules, decreasing hours, and unpaid leave creating workplace stress. Many caregivers feel their physical and mental health begin to decline. Caregiver stress symptoms include fatigue, irritability, changes in sleep and/or weight, and lacking interest in activities you've enjoyed. Caregivers must be mindful of any symptoms, as these indicators place you at risk for depression and anxiety.

THE CHALLENGES OF CAREGIVING

When caregivers don't receive the help they need, burnout can occur. This is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. It's often accompanied by a change in attitude. Where a caregiver was once positive, caring, and eager to help, burnout leaves one feeling negative, disconnected, and unconcerned. Another precursor to burnout is a caregiver attempting to do more physically or financially than they're able. Other caregiver burnout symptoms include:

- Declining physical health
- Feeling physically and emotionally tired
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Excessive use of substances like alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, etc.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

When it comes to caring for caregivers, there is no shortage of resources. There are support groups available through local hospitals and online services. A licensed therapist, social worker, or counselor is an excellent resource. Consider confiding in a family member or friend who will listen without judgement. Many find solace in their place of worship. In addition, there are often organizations available specific to your family member's illness or disability.

ACTION STEPS

- ✓ **Teamwork** - There's no shame in asking for help. Let family members choose their tasks; they'll be more likely to stick with them.
- ✓ **Say goodbye to guilt** - Reduce afternoon naps to 30 minutes or less.
- ✓ **Stay informed** - Many nonprofit organizations offer classes about aging, dementia, and other caregiving topics.
- ✓ **Keep connections** - Family members may need ideas for how to be involved. Keep everyone informed to maintain strong ties.
- ✓ **Update your doctor** - Inform your doctor of your caregiving responsibilities to monitor for any caregiver stress indicators.
- ✓ **Be healthy** - Maintaining good sleep, eating, and exercise habits will only benefit you. Do not apologize for practicing good self-care.

KEEP IN MIND

Though millions of people are caregiving, it can feel isolating. Knowing you are not alone is vital. Be courageous and find your community of support.

What steps will you take today to achieve a balance between self-care and caregiving?