



Geriatric Connections.... Support and Services for Older Adults

Identifying Caregiver Burnout

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A family or informal caregiver is generally recognized as a family member or friend who completes tasks for someone who is unable to complete on their own. At times being a caregiver is a short term role, such as when someone is recovering from surgery or a broken leg. During these times the changes in daily routines and responsibilities are temporary. Caregivers have more patience and are willing to make sacrifices to ensure their loved one is cared for properly because there is an expected ending. However, when caregiving continues for longer periods of time complications with daily life and the feelings experienced by the caregiver can change.

Caregiver burnout is a term used to describe a physical and emotional condition experienced by people who are caring for a loved one. It is not a sign of weakness or lack of caring that can cause burnout. It simply goes with the territory.

If caregivers experience two or more of the symptoms listed below it is time to take a look at the situation and begin to help themselves.

- Increased irritability
- Sleep problems
- Withdrawal from friends, family and loved ones
- Getting sick more often
- Loss of interest in previous activities
- Being easily angered by, and constantly annoyed at the care recipient or others
- Change in eating habits with evident and unintended weight increase or decrease
- Losing interest in work/decreased productivity
- Feeling increased resentment
- Being on the verge of tears and crying often
- Unrelenting feelings of sadness, depression
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling completely overwhelmed with worry about how you will manage

The role of caregiver can be a challenge but it can also bring feelings of purpose, love and accomplishment. Caregivers are a vital part of the human experience. The key is to find a healthy balance between caregiving and other aspects of life. Below are some suggestions to follow to reduce caregiver burnout and provide a balanced lifestyle.

- Take time to focus on yourself: Do something that brings you pleasure, call a friend or see a movie
- Exercise daily: even light exercise can improve your outlook
- Talk to someone about the challenges you face as a caregiver: join a support group, go out with friends or contact a professional
- Share your caregiving responsibilities with someone in order to give you a break from caregiving but also to give the care recipient a break from you. Healthy relationships benefit from respites