



Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself

Caring for a loved one strains even the most resilient people. If you're a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and well-being.

As the population ages, more caregiving is being provided by people who aren't health care professionals. About 1 in 3 adults in the United States provides care to other adults as informal caregivers.

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need, such as an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative. However,

family members who are actively caring for an older adult often don't self-identify as a "caregiver." Recognizing this role can help caregivers receive the support they need.

Elder Abuse Prevalence

It is estimated that there are at least 4 million older adults that are abused or neglected each year. However, this number is difficult to determine as most abuse is not reported. It is thought that for every reported abuse case of the elderly, over 20 more go unreported. The abuse can happen at home with family members, by in-home caregivers and within nursing home facilities. Abuse is often not reported by the victims because they are afraid, embarrassed or even are trying to protect their abuser when it is a loved one or family member.

How Caregiver Stress Leads To Elder Abuse

Caring for an elderly person, whether it is the care of a family member or in

a professional capacity is a difficult job. It can be physically and emotionally draining. It can lead to a risk for elder abuse. Stress causes fatigue on the body and mind, making it more difficult for caregivers to cope with the pressures of caring for an elderly person. This may cause them to react in ways that are exaggerated, including verbal and physical abuse of their charges, or flee from their responsibilities and abuse the elderly person through neglect or abandonment.



Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't realize that your own health and well-being are suffering. Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired often
- Getting too much sleep or not enough sleep
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy

To help manage caregiver stress:

- **Accept help.** Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would like to do.
- **Focus on what you are able to provide.** It's normal to feel guilty sometimes; understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver.
- **Set realistic goals.** Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine. Begin to say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting holiday meals.
- **Join a support group.** Support groups can provide validation and

encouragement, as well as problem-solving strategies for difficult situations. People in support groups understand what you may be going through.

Respite care

It may be hard to imagine leaving your loved one in someone else's care; but taking a break can be one of the best things you do for yourself — as well as the person you're caring for. Most communities have some type of respite care available, such as:

- **In-home respite.** Health care aides come to your home to provide companionship, nursing services or both.
- **Adult care centers and programs.** Some centers provide care for both older adults and young children, and the two groups may spend time together.
- **Short-term nursing homes.** Some assisted living homes, memory care homes and nursing homes accept people needing care for short stays while caregivers are away.

Get connected. Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Caregiving services such as transportation, meal delivery or housekeeping may be available. Rather than struggling on your own, take advantage of local resources for caregivers.

To get started, contact **Region IV Area Agency on Aging at 800-654-2810** to learn about services in your community.

If you suspect or witness elder abuse please contact:

Adult Protective Services:

855-444-3911

Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman Program:

866-485-9393

