

## Caring for Yourself as a Caregiver

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I The demands and rewards of caring for someone are unique and ongoing.

Health-related- caregiving is stressful and its impact on your physical and mental health should not be underestimated

Relationship with the person you are caring for-

What is the quality of that relationship? What is the extent to which each person can openly communicate his/her wants and needs- physical and emotional?

Interpersonal relationships- friends, family, health professionals, neighbors. Are you isolated? Do you feel comfortable asking for help when you need it? Can you depend on others to give you the help you need? Is that help given freely?

Intrapsychic aspects- satisfaction, burden, depression, anger, guilt, feeling trapped, isolated, frustrated, or dependent, grief - Your own as well as those of the person you are caring for. Did you willingly do this or were you asked to do it? Has how you define yourself changed? How do you react to this change?

II An important first step is accurately assessing what these demands are and their likely impact on you.

Your own health: diet, physical exercise, sleep

Assessing how much stress you are feeling and developing ways of coping with this stress

You may underestimate this- be honest, know your limits, be willing to ask for help, find someone to talk to, seek out information, do not suppress your emotions, resist the tendency to label some emotions as bad while others are good

Look for the good things in being a caregiver- what is it that you find satisfying or meaningful?

Set meaningful goals for yourself- those that you can achieve and that will improve matters for you and hopefully, for the person you are caring for.

III Find a help source- your convoy of support.

Is there someone you can call whenever you are feeling sad, depressed, angry, guilty, or when you are ill?

When you ask for help, be specific (what you need done, when, how often?).

A trusted friend, an organization that pertains to your loved one's illness  
Schedule time for yourself on a daily basis, have a set time to talk to this special person

If possible, do something that you enjoy daily either alone/with someone else

Develop your own network of support- your church, friends, neighbors, family members, professionals, a support group.

#### IV Develop coping skills to deal with the stress you are experiencing

Assess when you need help and what kind of help you need- draw up a daily routine and analyze it in this light.

Are there caregiving skills that you need? How do you acquire them?

What are your physical and emotional limits? How do you feel when you exceed those limits?

Are you able to be honest with yourself in terms of what you are feeling and experiencing?

Coping is an active, purposeful process- What are your short term and long term goals? For you personally? Vocationally? Interpersonally? Physically? Spiritually?

What is your particular style of coping?

Appraisal focused (using logic and mental preparation, reframing or redefining, social comparison, denying or minimizing stress)

Problem focused (seeking information and support, taking action, identifying new rewards)

Emotion focused (recognizing and regulating one's emotions, being able to express one's feelings, using jokes and humor, being able to accept emotionally certain aspects of the situation)

Some styles work in some situations and not in others. Coping styles often need to shift as your caregiving situation changes.

#### V Assess whether what you have tried is working or not and be willing to make adjustments.

Am I actually doing what I planned to do? (Under stress we often fall back into previously learned patterns of behaving and feeling)

Should I change how I am reacting? Behaving? Feeling? Communicating?

Do I need more help? New skills? More information?

Am I taking on too much responsibility?

Try to identify something positive that has come of your caregiving:

Have you acquired a new skill?

Have you improved your time management?

Do you have more help in meeting your caregiving responsibilities?

Has your health improved?

Has your mood improved?

Are you more optimistic about the future?

**\*Focus on what you can change (your reaction to the challenges of caregiving), and accept the things you cannot change.**

**\*Look to your strengths, not your weaknesses!**

**\*Ask for help when you need it?**

**\*Be realistic, yet optimistic!**