

Caring for Your Older Relative: Coping with Age-Related Impairments/Issues

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Family members who play a major role in caring for elderly relatives frequently ignore their own needs. Some find themselves spending much time at home consumed by caregiver tasks. When this is prolonged over months it can be harmful. The following information will discuss the sources of stress and how you can deal with it more productively and benefit the person whom you are providing care. Remember it is just as important to take care of your own needs as to provide the best care for you dependent loved one.

The Caregiver:

You may be a spouse, son, daughter, neighbor, close friend, or distant relative. As a caregiver you are making concessions and personal sacrifice to provide care for another person. This can create areas of conflict and high levels of stress in your life. At any age, you probably have important goals and plans that are interrupted or postponed of caregiver responsibilities.

As a caregiver you may be providing care out of love or out of some obligation. You may be providing the support alone or coordinating the work of others. You may find caregiver tasks satisfying and rewarding or completely frustrating.

What is a Caregiver:

It can evolve slowly, over along period of time, or suddenly, in the cause of illness or accident. The older person may live with you, near you, or miles away. The elderly person may be physically disabled or mentally incapacitated, or both. Depending on the specific need, care-giving can be a lot of different activities, including:

- Providing round-the-clock supervision
- Supervising others who provide direct care
- Shopping
- Answering the telephone
- Traveling to and from the relative's home
- Maintaining two home – your and that of you relative
- Lifting, bathing, dressing, and feeding
- Managing incontinence
- Providing for health care
- Listening, talking, and providing emotional support

Whether you are providing round-the-clock direct care or coordinating others who provide direct care, you are still the caregiver. You are responsible to some degree for another person's well-being. No matter how loving the relationship, care-giving almost

always involves some personal sacrifice and stress which can be seen in the following symptoms:

- Emotional or physical exhaustion
- Depression
- Marital problems
- Family problems
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Conflict among life roles – spouse, employee, parent, and caregiver
- Neglect or abuse of the older person

You may feel that there are too many expectations and not enough time and energy to meet them all. Unresolved, excessive, or prolonged stress results in what often is called “burnout.” When challenges and demands are too great they drain our physical energy, time, health, and money. Becoming aware of how stress takes hold is the first step toward coping with it.

Caregiver Stress – Symptoms and Causes:

The Warning Signs of Stress:

When you experience an unusual level of stress, certain warning signals occur. Answering the following questions will increase your awareness of these signs:

1. Do you feel a loss of energy or zest for life?
2. Do you feel out of control, exhibiting uncharacteristic emotions or actions?
3. Do you lack interest in people or things that were formerly pleasurable?
4. Are you becoming increasingly isolated?
5. Are you consuming an increased amount of sleeping pills, medications, alcohol, drugs, caffeine, or cigarettes?
6. Are you having increased health problems; for example, high blood pressure, ulcers, or difficulties with digestion?
7. Do you have difficulty falling asleep at night, awakening early, or sleeping excessively?
8. Are you experiencing appetite changes?
9. Do you have problems with concentration or memory?
10. Are you increasingly irritable or impatient with others?
11. Do you have thoughts of suicide?

Disability Management: Coping with Age-Related Impairments

“Getting older doesn’t stop us from enjoying life, but it might slow us down a little,” look on the website below for news and resources for seniors on disability management and coping with age-related impairments.

To learn more about Senior Disability management and age-related impairments click: www.seniorliving.about.com/od/agerelateddisabilities/ - You will be provided information on articles & resources, rules to prevent falling, preventing and coping with disabilities.

Other websites & Links on Caregivers, home safety, support groups, stress, etc.:

The Consultation Center – <http://www.consultationcenter.com/Lconsultsmp.htm> Discusses the decision to place an older parent in a nursing home. This may be a cultural difference, because two of our consultants had dramatically different views on this article, with one believing it was a reasonable look at the issue and the other taking the stand that the daughter should tell all of her friends to drop dead, that a perfectly health 75-year-old woman should be living at home with her family, no discussion about it.

Alzheimer’s Disease Education & Referral Center - www.alzheimers.org/caregiving/index.htm - This web site will provide you with information on Home/Family Caregivers resources, tips for caregivers, coping, dealing with the diagnosis, bathing, dressing, exercising, driving, visiting the doctor, support groups, etc.

Family Caregivers Online – http://www.familycaregiversonline.com/family_caregiver_module_9.htm

A federally funded information website to support caregivers. This website uses modules that will help you learn more about how to cope with physical and psychological health effects of caregiving. Information includes; the challenge of caregiving, link to National Family Caregivers Association, practical stress management tips, benefits of joining a support group, etc.