

Tips for Caregivers

Caregiving is a fundamental aspect of family and community life, but it can be challenging. It can create physical, emotional and financial strains on a caregiver. Studies show that caregivers who experience stress and burden are more likely to 'burn-out' or give up on their daily caregiving responsibilities. They look for alternatives – frequently placing their loved one in a nursing home. Research also shows that caregivers need to take care of themselves first so they can remain healthy and able to continue their caregiving roles.

Caregivers help others with everyday tasks ranging from grocery shopping or driving someone to a medical appointment to taking care of someone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Caregivers are husbands, wives, partners, daughters, sons, other relatives, friends, neighbors, a grandparent caring for a grandchild, parents caring for a child with special needs, a teenager helping his parents care for his grandfather, and others. Recognize yourself as a 'caregiver' and then take time to care for yourself.

If you have ever been on an airplane, the crew has instructed you – in case of an emergency – to put on your oxygen mask before helping others. The same logic applies in caregiving - you can only help someone else if you are well enough to do so. You need rest, proper nutrition, exercise and socialization.

Take a break

Schedule time for yourself and do what works for you! Find out about respite services in your area. These services provide you with a temporary break from your caregiving role. You can then devote time to yourself while your loved one is cared for by someone else, for example, a trained person in your home or in an adult day care setting.

Find others like yourself

Caregiving can make you feel lonely and isolated, yet other caregivers face the same issues and experience the same emotions as you. Talking to other caregivers or a caregiver counselor is one way for you to relieve stress and feelings of helplessness. You can join a support group or seek out a 'telephone buddy.' You can also find support on the Internet in caregiver chat rooms or on-line support groups.

Recognize warning signs of stress and depression

Know what works for you in terms of reducing stress and take action. Take a walk, go to dinner



with a friend, talk to someone. Know the signs and symptoms of depression and seek medical attention if needed. Symptoms of depression include feeling down or hopeless, little interest in doing things previously enjoyed, sleep disturbances, fatigue/lack of energy, appetite changes, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, difficulty concentrating, slowed movement, recurrent preoccupation with death or suicidal thoughts. Don't ignore depression or wait for it to go away by itself.

Get training

Look for seminars and training courses to learn skills and practical tips such as how to safely move a person from a bed to a wheelchair, how to make adjustments for someone with diminishing sight, or how to deal with grief or loss and end of life issues. Look for training on how to deal with stress and learn coping skills that will benefit you.

Accept offers to help you

It's okay to ask for, and to accept, help. If someone - a relative, friend or neighbor - offers to lend you a hand, say "Yes, thank you!" The relief their help can provide may enhance the care you provide. Keep a list of possible areas of assistance handy in case someone offers.

Educate yourself

Talk to your loved one's health care provider about their illness or disease/frailty, search on-line for information, talk to a staff person at your local office for the aging. Sometimes understanding what is happening and what you can expect will help you better cope with a situation.

Contact your local office for the aging to talk to someone and to learn about services in your area that can help you. Call the NYSOFA Senior Citizens' Helpline at 1-800-342-9871. You can also log on to the NYSOFA Caregiver website at: <http://www.aging.state.ny.us/caring/index.htm>