

## **Caring for the Caregiver**

Caregiving is a tremendous responsibility, and while most caregivers find the experience rewarding, you may also feel taxed, both emotionally and physically. Perhaps this is because you spend so much time taking care of your loved one that you are failing to take care of yourself. If so, you're not alone. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, caregivers don't sleep well, eat well, exercise, or make it to their own medical appointments. Not surprisingly, the emotional toll of caregiving — not to mention the physical requirements of providing care and the day-to-day demands on your time and resources — can lead to extreme stress.

To assess how caring for your loved one is affecting your own physical and emotional health, the Family Caregiver Alliance suggests that you ask yourself the following questions:

### **Is my caregiving voluntary?**

You could feel strain and resentment if you had no choice in taking on the responsibility.

### **What is my relationship like with my loved one?**

If you took on the responsibility of caregiving in the hope of healing a broken relationship, you could feel regretful or discouraged if that healing is not occurring.

### **How are my coping abilities?**

How you have coped with stress in the past can help predict how you will cope in the future.

### **How demanding is this caregiving situation?**

The intensity of care needed can contribute to the amount of stress you feel.

### **Am I alone?**

Have you considered asking other family members or outside support services for help? Research shows that only 10 to 20% of family caregivers use formal services through public or private agencies.

Identify the stress factors you can and cannot change. Trying to change things you cannot control will only increase your sense of frustration. On the other hand, making change where change is possible can enhance your feelings of control and help reduce anxiety.

### **That's why it's important to:**

- Make yourself sit down and eat three meals a day. It's easy to forget to eat when you're busy and stressed. Sometimes it helps to prepare food for two meals when cooking.

- Take a nap while your loved one rests. If your nighttime sleep is disturbed because you're giving medications or assisting your loved one with bathroom needs, you need extra rest during the day.
- Make time for yourself. Take a walk alone or with a friend, read a good book, relax in a warm tub, call a friend.
- Let others help you. Friends and other family members need to participate to lessen the helplessness we all feel when someone we love is terminally ill. Accept family members' and friends' offers of help.
- Let people bring meals, run errands, sit with your loved one, take the children out. Hospice volunteers are available as well, and they want to help you with these tasks.
- Talk to friends and family about your feelings and concerns. Sometimes a worry is easier to handle when it is shared with someone who cares. This may not be easy, but it can be healing to cry and express emotions. Members of your Care Team will take time to listen and offer help.

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