

Support 4 CAREGIVERS

Your sister criticizes you for the kind of care your mom is receiving; your husband is resentful of the time you are spending with your disabled mother; you missed your son's basketball final; and your colleagues at work are losing patience over the time you take off for caregiving. When you take on the responsibilities of caring for a disabled or elderly family member, you may feel pulled in many different directions all at once. You know that to be fair to everyone, you need to look after your own physical and emotional well-being. Ask yourself -

- *Do I resent the disabled or elderly person in my care?*
- *Do I resent family members because they do not do their share?*
- *Do I find little satisfaction in taking care of the person?*
- *Do I have difficulty saying no or asking for help when I need it?*

If you answer yes to any of these questions, ask yourself: *Am I the best person to be doing the caregiving or is someone else available?*

Avoid Caregiver Burnout

When it comes to helping elderly or disabled people, regardless of age, more is not necessarily better. While often it can be easier and certainly quicker for the caregiver to do things for the person, excessive assistance can erode their sense of competence and independence, thereby diminishing their life skills. If you are caring for a disabled child, it may not allow them to develop the life skills in the first place. This is just one of the many reasons caregivers fall victim to shouldering too much responsibility.

Are you feeling overwhelmed; overeating or undereating; depleting your own financial resources, crying frequently; sleeping fitfully; drinking or abusing other drugs (including over the counter medications); developing symptoms such as headaches, backaches, breathing problems, or lingering colds; or just not having any fun? If so, you may be experiencing caregiver burnout.

Get Some Relief

Develop a potential network of people and organizations you can recruit if needed.

Let your needs be known to family, friends, neighbours, and volunteers. Call them now. You may need to hire help (this could be a teenager or college student).

Join supportive discussion groups for tips and emotional support.

Explore the internet for caregiver chat rooms, discussion forums, bulletin boards, and links to other sites. Contact specific illness associations (diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, Alzheimer's, etc). They often have programs for family members and educational materials.

Explore wellness programs tailored to the needs of the elderly or disabled

These programs should focus on the roles that diet, stress reduction, and physical and mental exercise play in promoting wellness and positive vitality.

Talk with a counsellor

Counsellors can help you explore and defuse some of your feelings.



Get A Good Night's Sleep

Caregiver's sleep is often interrupted and anything but peaceful. The disabled or elderly person may have difficulty sleeping at night or be prone to nocturnal wandering and activity, or the care regimen may require your attendance during the night.

- To catch up, you may need a night nurse or another helper to stay over for a few nights.
- Keep in touch with the person's physician so a plan of action can be arranged if their condition changes.
- Increase your exercise during the day. Exercise at lunch time if you are working.
- Consider adult or disabled daycares during the day, even if you are not working.
- Set up an activity table or the television with remote control for them if they wake during the night.

Help the Disabled Or Elderly to Maintain A Life That Satisfies Their Basic Needs

It is easy for the elderly to feel abandoned. This can result from either their close friends continuing to die or their family living too far away or appearing to not have time for them. This often leads to self-imposed withdrawal from social opportunities. The elderly may need help to make new friends with whom they can share the final years of their lives. It may also help to get the person to take on a project. It can be as simple as planting a window box. A popular project is to document their family history, start them writing a journal, or taping their remembrances.

Regularly review with their physician their use of corrective lenses, hearing aids, and medication. Assist them to keep track of which drugs to take and when (including over the counter drugs). As you build confidence and are comfortable with the caregiving situation, you will feel more in control and better able to balance caregiving and other obligations.

Eldercare and illness usually come in two stages- the planning stage and the crisis stage. Become proactive and explore what will be available for the person before it is needed. Involving the disabled or elderly person in the planning may help alleviate their and your anxieties.

Deciding On Institutional Care

The decision to place a family member in an extended care facility with nursing care is a difficult one. Leaving their home means many losses for the disabled and elderly and their sorrow needs to be recognized and not ignored. Taking the time to plan can make the transition much easier. You may want to arrange help for them in dealing with these losses.

Caring at a Distance

If you are dealing with an elderly or disabled person who lives a distance away, visit their area to organize as much as you can, including-

- care in the house and meals delivered to the person.
- an emergency response device.
- a telephone buddy who will call them every day to check on them & if they are hard of hearing, ensure their telephone is properly equipped
- cab cards for the person so they can get around on their own if they are able and then they do not have to carry cash or credit cards.