

Caregiver Burnout

I'm feeling overwhelmed and guilty, what should I do?

How often do those thoughts pop up in the course of a caregiver's day or week? People today are feeling tremendous pressure to "do it all," taking care of children and aging parents while maintaining career and home.

Instead of having a sense of accomplishment, many people feel guilt when they run out of energy to handle all of the tasks. "Being a member of the sandwich generation is like being a slice of bologna, expected to give taste and meaning to two slices of bread ... your children on one side, and your parents on the other side."

The great myth of our time is that we should be able to "do it all," like previous generations seem to have done. The truth is that some of our parents and grandparents did care for their parents at home, however, the reality is that there was a close extended family available to pitch in and share the care.

Pablo Casals, the world-renowned cellist said, "The capacity to care is the thing that gives life its deepest significance and meaning." Learning your potential for caregiver burnout and developing a plan of action will help you avoid the frustration, depression, and despair that comes with losing that capacity to care.

Causes of Caregiver Burnout

One of the most common causes of caregiver burnout is the changing of roles that happens between adult children and their aging parents. The dynamics that keep a family together suddenly change, and the line that separates parental and child roles becomes blurred.

Another cause of caregiver burnout is the expectations the caregiver has for the outcome of the caregiving. Often the rewards are intangible and far off, and the lack of control he or she feels over the situation is compounded by other factors such as lack of finances, little or no family support, or poor management and planning skills. When the caregiver places unrealistic goals on the outcome, there is no solid sense of

direction. Feelings of isolation become more prevalent as the caregiver sees himself or herself spiraling downward into a pool of frustration and despair.

Preventing Caregiver Burnout

You can prevent caregiver burnout by taking the following actions:

- Know yourself and take a reality check of your situation. Recognize your potential for caregiver burnout. If you can recall an instance of attitude change because of stress, then you're a candidate for burnout.
- Know how to be a caregiver. The more you know about the illness of the person you're caring for and strategies for caregiving, the more effective you will be.
- Develop new tools for coping. Remember to lighten up and accentuate the positive. Stay healthy by eating right and getting plenty of exercise and sleep. Take an occasional break from caregiving and don't be afraid to ask for help. Take advantage of support groups made up of other caregivers who have experienced what you are going through. Their knowledge and experience can provide invaluable support.
- Plan your days by assigning priorities. Don't forget to take some time to reward yourself. Have hope and live in the moment. Remember the saying, "by the yard it's hard, but by the inch it's a cinch."

Resources you can use to aid in your search for assistance are your local Area Agency on Aging, Senior Center and Ombudsman Program. Area Agencies on Aging can give you information on the types and locations of local in-home respite services, home-delivered meal programs, support groups, adult day care, and other services.

Carebridge can provide assistance in locating eldercare resources nationwide.

Courtesy of the Ohio State University Extension

Contact Carebridge at **800.437.0911** or visit **www.myliferesource.com** for more information!

