



Preventing Caregiver Burnout

Caring for someone who is sick or disabled causes tremendous stress. This stress comes from several sources, and each has a different effect on the caregiver.

Being Far Away. In most families, people are spread out across the country and are not always available to help care for a sick or elderly person. This places extra stress on the person nearby, who often contribute the most in terms of time and money toward the patient's care.

Financial Stress. This is inevitable when someone requires an excessive amount of care. For example:

- Many caregivers spend their own money to cover expenses that are not covered by health insurance or Medicare.
- The family members who are less involved may not realize how expensive certain items are and may even resist helping to pay for them.
- The primary caregiver may have to work fewer hours or find less demanding work (which may pay less money). Many caregivers have to stop working completely in order to care for the patient.

Cultural Expectations. In some cultures, daughters are expected to care for parents. In others, it is not acceptable to place relatives in nursing homes.

Relationship Stress. Because of the added responsibilities, a caregiver may neglect his or her spouse and children. Marital problems become exacerbated, if not openly discussed and resolved. Children may not feel their parent is available for them. When facing a medical crisis, it is not unusual for couples to get divorced or separated and children feeling abandoned.

Physical Stress. Caring for an ailing person can be a physical challenge. Activities like cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and shopping can be exhausting, especially when they are added to the responsibilities of the caregiver's own life.

Home alterations. If the patient continues to live at home, the caregivers may need to make alterations such as building ramps or railings. Everyone in the home will have to adjust.

Social Stress. Providing personal care 24 hours a day can cut off the primary caregiver from family and friends. The caregiver may be too tired to have an evening out, or

may not have anyone else to take over. This can result in feeling angry and resentful.

Emotional Stress. As a result of these stresses, it is not unusual to feel a range of emotions, including anger, resentment, anxiety, frustration, sadness, and guilt. These negative emotions may conflict with the love caregivers feel for their family member. Although the caregiver feels much satisfaction from being able to love and care for a family member, the quality of his or her life can diminish as a consequence of being the caregiver.

With all these kinds of stress, it is not surprising that many caregivers become overwhelmed and begin to feel burned out.

STRENGTH THROUGH SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Challenges are for personal and spiritual growth. As the caregiver, you can choose to focus on anger, bitterness, rejection of G-d, rejection of your better self, even rejection of your child or loved one who is ill. You can also choose the opposite—dedication to your child and family, gratitude to G-d, love, understanding, patience. You can extend your influence to helping others like you, after all, you are uniquely able to understand their pain.

The mind, spiritual, and body connection is now recognized by science. More than drugs and therapy, it is your love, strength, positive outlook, and prayers that bring healing to your loved one and help your family grow stronger and closer through this experience.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Try to find out about resources before you need them.

- **Seek all the support help you can find. Be on the lookout for groups, individuals, and organizations**



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that provide emotional, social, physical, and financial support.

- Ask your family and friends for help. They may be able to provide you with time, knowledge, or money.
- Investigate adult day care facilities. They offer therapeutic, rehabilitative, and support services such as nursing, social work services, meals, or transportation.
- Consider having meals delivered. Many organizations provide nutritional programs.
- Consider hiring a home health aide. Aides can provide personal care at home, such as help with eating, dressing, oral hygiene, bathing, administering medication, and light household tasks.
- Find out about homemaker services. These services can assist with shopping, laundry, housecleaning, preparing meals, and taking clients to medical appointments.
- Look into the offerings of hospital and surgical supply services. They rent or sell medical supplies and equipment, such as hospital beds, canes, walkers, bath chairs, and oxygen.
- Check out respite care services. They provide relief to caregivers. Look into social day care services. They provide recreational activities, social work services, hot meals, transportation, and some health services.
- Find out about transportation services. They provide transportation to and from medical appointments or other care services.
- Find out about skilled nursing services. They offer professional help with specific medical problems.
- **Make your marriage a priority and connect with your spouse every day.**
- **If you have children, make sure you are available as a parent. They only have one childhood, and they deserve a happy childhood.**
- Maintain your interests. Keep balance in your life.

- Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Recognize what you can and cannot do.
- Maintain communication with your family and friends. When tensions and misunderstandings develop (and they will), address them quickly.
- **Take care of yourself so you stay healthy. Eat well, exercise, rest, and take time off.**

SIGNS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT

How do you know if the stress is becoming overwhelming? The following is a list of signs that a caregiver may need help. Take a moment to look through these and identify those that are now problems for you (or someone in your family) or that may be potential problems.

- You don't get out much anymore.
- You argue with the person you care for.
- You have conflicts with other family members.
- You abuse drugs, alcohol, or medications.
- Your appetite has changed.
- You isolate yourself from others.
- You behave in a compulsive manner or are overly focused on minor details.
- You feel listless; you lack energy.
- You feel more angry, anxious, or worried than usual.
- You have a difficult time controlling your emotions.
- You have a hard time concentrating.
- You have physical symptoms of anxiety, such as an upset stomach, headaches, or racing heart.
- You often forget things.
- You are clumsy or accident-prone.
- You have self-destructive or suicidal thoughts.
- You sleep more or less than usual.
- You never seem to get enough rest.
- You feel guilty about your situation.



Dr. Jonathan Isaacson is a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in pre-marital and marriage counseling. He also specializes in helping singles choose healthy partners and loving relationships. With proven and timeless principles and strategies, you can create a loving marriage that will last a lifetime. Dr. Isaacson guides his clients to resolve couples distress and overcome challenges. He offers programs on marriage/relationship enhancement that includes a couple's personality and relationship profiles. Dr. Isaacson helps individuals overcome psychological and emotional problems which only become exacerbated in a relationship. He is the Director of **The Marriage Clinic** in Beachwood, Ohio and can be reached at **216-292-4500**.