

# Dealing with Caregiver Stress

Caring for a loved one can be very rewarding, but at the same time it can be very exhausting and a lot of hard work. Caregiving can be a cause of great stress, especially if you are constantly worrying about your loved one, tired, and running low on energy yourself. It is very important that when you are caring for a loved one that you make sure to take care of yourself, and utilize all the available resources to help alleviate some of the burden.

## *Signs of Caregiver Stress:*

- Feeling sad or moody
- Low energy level
- Not making medical appointments
- Feeling uncaring or angry with the person you are caring for
- Trouble sleeping
- No time for yourself
- Seeing friends and family less often
- Eating too much or too little
- Loss of interest in activities you use to enjoy

## *Taking Care of Yourself:*

To prevent the negative outcomes of caregiver stress it is important for you to make sure you are taking care of yourself. If you become sick or worn down you will not be able to continue to help take care of your loved one. Look through this list and see where you may be putting yourself at increased risk for burnout related to caregiver stress.

- **Sleep:** Get as much rest and sleep as possible, at least 8 hours every night. Getting enough sleep increases your energy, and increases your resilience to deal with stress. See sleep hygiene section on page 4 for tips to help you get restful sleep.
- **Diet:** Eat a healthy diet which includes fruits, vegetables, protein and whole grains. Limit caffeine and sugars, these may give you an initial energy boost but they are followed a rapid decrease in energy, an increase in fatigue, tiredness and irritability (also known as a “caffeine or sugar crash”). If you cannot eat a full meal, at least eat some healthy snacks throughout the day. Eating healthy increases your energy, and it also increases your resilience to deal with stress.
- **Respite time:** Make sure you have social and family respite time. Plan ahead for a break for yourself and for something you enjoy. Enjoy time away without feeling guilty.
- **Help from others:** Look for opportunities to lighten the work. Ask for help from other family members, friends, neighbors, religious or spiritual advisors and hospital support services. Your friends and family may not know how to help you, so be ready to suggest a helpful job if someone asks you if you need help. Things other people can do to help may include making dinner, getting your mail or helping take care of your pets. Seek support and tips from other caregivers. Stay in touch with your sense of humor, laughing can be very therapeutic!

# *Dealing with Caregiver Stress Continued*

- **Stress management:** Learn new ways to deal with stress. Consider learning how to do relaxation exercises to help deal with stress (see Relaxation Exercises section on page 5). Try reading, watching TV, or exercising to distract you and help you relax. Talk with others about your feelings, this is a very therapeutic emotional release to discuss with others what you are going through and how you are feeling. Try to accept things that you cannot change, because it does not help to stress over and worry about things that are not in your control. Break a challenge into smaller parts, and try to take one thing at a time.
- **Avoid unhealthy ways of dealing with stress:** This includes eating too much, not eating enough, smoking drinking or using drugs. Do not withdrawal or become silent about your needs. Stay in touch with your friends and family. Make sure you stay in tune to your own healthy needs, and do not skip doctor's or other necessary appointments that you need to attend.
- **Professional help:** Do not delay getting professional help if stress, exhaustion and depression are preventing you from enjoying activities you usually take pleasure in. A counselor can help you cope with stress and deal with problems. A mental health professional can prescribe medicines to help with feelings of depression or if you are having issues with sleep.