

Caregiving Tips

Feel Good About What You Do & Take Care of Your Own Health

Being a caregiver is rewarding, yet challenging work...

Anyone who has provided care for someone knows it is also challenging in addition to being rewarding. It can be challenging on the caregiver, both physically and emotionally.

What happens if you do not take care of yourself?...

The possibilities include:

- Total exhaustion, or burnout
- Stress-induced illness
- Aggravation of a medical condition you may already have
- Taking frustration out on others

After providing care for and giving so much of your energy to others, you may feel drained at the end of the day. Taking care of yourself (or self-care) is important in keeping both your mind and body healthy.

What are the signs and symptoms of stress ?

Physical: headaches, increased blood pressure, nausea, sleeping disorders

Cognitive, or Mental: difficulty concentrating, memory problems, slow thinking, difficulty making decisions, disturbing dreams

Emotional: fear, anxiety, guilt, irritation, sadness, depression, anger

Behavioral: withdrawal, suspiciousness, excessive silence, excessive humor, increase or decrease of food or alcohol intake, increased smoking

What can you do about stress?...

Get in touch with yourself. Getting in touch with ourselves means recognizing and admitting what we are feeling. Typically stress is present when we are feeling:

- ⇒ Frustrated
- ⇒ Angry
- ⇒ Helpless
- ⇒ Depressed

The ABCs for stress management:

Accept: Once we acknowledge and accept stress, we can begin to address it.

Balance: Stress throws us out of balance. We regain it by adapting the kinds and levels of our activities.

Clarify: Stress narrows our focus and limits our perceptions. Misunderstandings and mistakes multiply. We clarify by putting things in perspective and allowing ourselves to see the larger picture. Once we clarify, we regain control and are able to define what is most important and deal with challenges more effectively.

Once you have performed the ABCs above, you are on the way to coming up with a coping strategy for effectively managing your stress. Coping methods vary from person to person. Here are a few stress-busting activities for you to consider:

Take-off: Close your eyes and take a mental holiday for five minutes. Remember one soothing time in your life when you felt absolutely free and fantastic.

Get out: Take a vacation - even if you can only get away for one hour. The trick is to plan it, pack it and partake it with pleasure. Forget your other responsibilities and have some fun.

Sheer bliss: Lie down and close your eyes for 15 beautiful minutes.

Say “no”: It’s hard - especially sometimes, but saying “no” when you won’t or can’t assist will make you feel better - really!

Big blowout: Take 10 deep breaths, but exhale all the oxygen out of your lungs first.

Round and round you go: Feeling stiff? Move your head, neck, arms, fingers, legs, and toes in circles.

A turn of the lips: Smile. It’ll make you feel so much more positive.

Did you hear the one about...?: Tell a joke and share some laughter.

Seashells and salamanders: Start or rekindle a hobby - do it with flair and really learn about your subject.

Specialize: Do something out of the ordinary for yourself. Take a long bath, get a new haircut, or buy a special book.

Adapted from a courtesy submission by the St. Louis Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association.