

Tips on Caregiving

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need, such as an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative. However, family members who are actively caring for an older adult often don't self-identify as a "caregiver."

Recognizing this role can help caregivers receive the support they need. Informal caregivers provide 80% of long-term care in the United States.

Caregiving is rewarding but stressful

Caregiving can have many rewards. For most caregivers, being there when a loved one needs you is a core value and something you wish to provide. But a shift in roles and emotions is almost certain. It is natural to feel angry, frustrated, exhausted, alone or sad. Caregiver stress — the emotional and physical stress of caregiving — is common.

People who experience caregiver stress can be vulnerable to changes in their own health. Risk factors for caregiver stress include:

- Being female
- Having fewer years of formal education
- Living with the person you are caring for
- Social isolation
- Having depression
- Financial difficulties
- Higher number of hours spent caregiving
- Lack of coping skills and difficulty solving problems
- Lack of choice in being a caregiver

Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't realize that your own health and well-being are suffering. Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad
- Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems
- Abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications

Too much stress, especially over a long time, can harm your health. As a caregiver, you're more likely to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. In addition, you may not get enough sleep or physical activity, or eat a balanced diet — which increases your risk of medical problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.