

Caregiving encompasses many activities, which typically include everything from providing personal care like dressing and bathing to paying bills or doing chores. Most of us are juggling too many things and are at risk of burning out. So how do you know if you are “on the edge?” And, how do you get back?



Nothing left to give? Caregivers and burnout

By Audrey Miller, MSW, RSW, CCRC

One of the causes of caregiver burnout is the push to meet unrealistic expectations and demands that caregivers place upon themselves. Such expectations are often forced due to a lack of physical and financial resources. Other times, it may be that the caregiver feels sole responsibility for the well-being of their loved one, has difficulty saying “no,” has difficulty asking for help, or feels as though they are the only person capable of providing care.

If you have the following symptoms, you may be experiencing burnout:

- ❖ withdrawal from friends, family and other loved ones
- ❖ loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- ❖ irritability/feelings of hopelessness
- ❖ changes in appetite and/or weight
- ❖ changes in sleep patterns
- ❖ exhaustion

So what does burnout mean?

Burnout refers to feeling as though you have “nothing left”—you can’t give anything else to another person. Either emotionally, physically, mentally or spiritually (or all of the above), you feel drained. Over time, a caregiver can feel overwhelmed, exhausted, frustrated, resentful and guilty.

Burnout can put both the caregiver and the person being cared for at risk. Feeling stressed over long periods of time will affect the caregiver’s health, motivation, attitude, and mood. It can

also affect the person’s ability to cope with daily responsibilities. At work, these may mean taking more sick days, leaving work early, being pre-occupied while on the job, or passing up opportunities, just to name a few.

To help you manage better, consider the following steps as possible solutions:

- ❖ See if your employer has an eldercare program.
- ❖ If your company does not sponsor an eldercare program, ask them how to reduce your stress load. These may include flexible working hours, job sharing, working from home, the ability to say no when asked to work overtime, or taking vacation.
- ❖ Speak to an eldercare consultant about ways to reduce your stress load at home. These may include

obtaining respite care, sharing responsibilities with your family, exploring local community based programs; hiring someone to either help with care or in completing activities.

- ❖ Take some time for yourself.

Caregiver burnout takes many different forms and may result in personal own health issues. Never apologize for asking for help. Don’t assume others know what you need, and speak up.

Remember, the key to work-life balance is balance. Sometimes, we may need to speak to a professional to obtain equilibrium in our lives.

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Are you at risk?

To see if you’re burnt out, answer true or false to the following questions:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| I am always tired | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | I have a short temper | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don’t sleep well | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | and outbursts of anger | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I get sick often | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | I cry easily | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have gained or lost weight unintentionally | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | I worry about not having enough money to make ends meet | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have back pain or headaches and feel fatigued or depressed | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | I feel I don’t have enough knowledge or experience to give proper care | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don’t have time for myself | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| I have given up hobbies and reduced contact with friends and family | T <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
- If any of the above statements are true, you may be experiencing caregiver burnout. Ask for help!**
Source: Veterans Affairs Canada