

CAREGIVER STRESS

Most Americans will be informal caregivers at some point in their lives. During any given year, there are more than 44 million Americans (21% of the adult population) who provide unpaid care to an elderly or disabled person age 18 or older. Altogether, informal caregivers provide 80% of the long-term care in the United States.

While each care-giving situation is different, caregivers are likely to experience enormous stress from their responsibilities. Many caregivers do not recognize they need help until the problems seem overpowering and/or unsolvable. For this reason, identifying stress and finding practical ways to cope are especially important.

Signs of Caregiver Stress:

- » Denial about the level of stress involved in being a caregiver.
- » Anger at the loved one for needing continual care.
- » Social withdrawal from family, friends and activities that once brought pleasure.
- » Anxiety about facing another day and what the future holds.
- » Feelings of depression that drain energy and affect the ability to cope.
- » Exhaustion that makes it nearly impossible to complete necessary daily tasks.
- » Sleeplessness caused by worry, feelings of guilt and a never-ending list of concerns.
- » Irritability that can lead to pessimism and negativity.
- » Lack of concentration that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks.
- » Health problems that take their toll on mental and physical functioning.

Ways to Reduce Caregiver Stress:

- » Know the resources that are available in your community.
- » Become educated on the disease and care-giving techniques.
- » Get involved with local support groups.
- » Get help from family, friends and community resources.
- » Take care of yourself! Watch your diet, exercise and get plenty of rest.
- » Manage your level of stress by consulting a physician and using relaxation techniques.
- » Accept changes as they occur. Do legal and financial planning early in the disease process.
- » Be realistic about what you can do,
- » Give yourself credit, not guilt, if you lose your patience or can't do everything on your own.

What Resources are Available?

There are many resources available to assist caregivers including information and referral sources; respite care services to provide relief; adult day health services to help loved ones reach the highest level of functioning possible, and support groups.