



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU ARE TAKING CARE OF OTHERS WHO ARE ILL OR AGING

The Statistics Canada General Social Survey found that at some point in their lives 46% of Canadians are providing care, or looking after needs of a family member or friend with long-term health conditions, disability or aging needs. The caregiving responsibilities most often fell to those who are aged 45-64, and only a slight majority of these caregivers are female (54%). As a caregiver you can have multiple responsibilities such as providing transportation, doing housework, house maintenance and outdoor work, scheduling appoints, managing finances, helping with medical treatments and providing personal care – all while you are working and maybe also caring for children. In fact about one third of caregivers in Canada are also raising children under the age of 18. (Sinha, 2013) It is also important to note that while most reported only providing care to one person, 27% of Canadian caregivers report providing care to two persons, and 15% reported providing care to three or more persons. (Sinha, 2013)



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*As a caregiver, it is essential that you have strategies to prevent burnout and caregiver fatigue.  
You need to take care of yourself while you are taking care of others.*

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## STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING BURNOUT AND CAREGIVER FATIGUE

- Find your passions and take time to pursue them.
- Use stress reduction techniques such as yoga or deep breathing. Get a massage.
- Join a caregiver support group to share your experiences, or reach out and stay connected to people who can support you.
- Get away from caregiving responsibilities now and then. Get out of the house and walk in the sunlight.
- Exercise, get plenty of rest and eat nutritional meals. It may seem counterintuitive to exercise when you're exhausted, but sometimes exercise is the best remedy. It can give you more energy, and it will boost endorphins, the hormones that activate the body's opiate receptors and make everything seem better. Regular exercise is an integral part of self-care.
- In addition to all the other elements involved in caregiving, try to spend some quality time getting to know your parent's life story. It might take the tedium out of the tasks, and help remind you of why you're helping. Keep a positive spirit and a sense of humour.
- Delegate. Learn to ask for help at home and work.
- Slow down: pause for a few seconds before you respond to a stressful situation. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly.
- Try taking ten-minute breaks to listen to music or simply do nothing.
- Meditate. Research has proven that practicing mindfulness through meditation improves both mental and physical health because it strengthens the part of the brain that helps you cope with stress and anxiety. It can help improve your eating habits and prepare you to face the unexpected without fear and anxiety.

## IDENTIFY WHEN YOU'RE RUNNING ON EMPTY

Due to longer life expectancy, there are more seniors in our population, but most still need care toward the end of their lives, and historically, family caregiving in the home has been regarded as a private responsibility. This means we are caring for aging parents for more extended periods of time, and it also says we are at serious risk of overburdening ourselves.

As a caregiver, you need to add one final, important task to your list of things to do: Look after yourself so that you are still able to look after your loved ones. Some signs that you might be running on empty include (Bourg-Carter, 2018)

- Difficulty maintaining focus
- Loss of enjoyment for activities that you once enjoyed
- Excessive anxiety or worry
- Increase alcohol or drug use
- Increased absenteeism
- Many uncompleted projects despite long work hours
- Isolative behaviours
- Physical signs such as chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, sleep problems, headaches, chronic fatigue or increased illness

## THE DANGERS OF SELF-NEGLECT

Are you feeling guilty about the way caregiving makes you feel? Don't, because your symptoms are real. Research has concluded that caregiving can lead to depression, isolation and exhaustion. It can affect your immune system, your heart rate and your blood pressure. Symptoms can include difficulty sleeping, fatigue, a tendency to get sick, changes in appetite or weight – the stress can lead to eating too much or too little, and even to the increased use of medications or alcohol.

There are strong feelings of helplessness and hopelessness associated with caregiving because it never ends and it is unrelenting. It can result in exhaustion and resentment and a lack of pride in care activities, which could lead to sudden outbursts of anger directed at others, including the person being cared for. The decline of caregiver health is a key risk factor for the institutionalization and abuse or neglect of a care recipient. It can also affect your marriage and family life or your job, which could seriously alter financial stability. Even if your boss is understanding, providing flex hours, it may not be enough, and you may feel you need to leave the workforce altogether.

## **KNOW WHEN YOU NEED HELP**

Without respite or stress reduction strategies, the caregiver's health is put at risk, along with the ability to provide care. Getting help can not only improve your physical health, but it can also enhance the ability to handle stress, improve attitudes toward the person being cared for, and improve family functioning.

## **FIND A SUPPORT GROUP**

Find a support group specific to the illness suffered by the person you are caring for, including dementia or Alzheimer's Disease, both for information and emotional support. Contact the Alzheimer's Society, for example, by visiting: <http://alzheimer.ca/en> .

Or, if you live in Ontario, you can visit the Ontario Caregiver Coalition which provides some provincial resources and groups to provide support for family caregivers by visiting: <http://www.ontariocaregivercoalition.ca/caregiver-resources.html>

## **FIND RESPITE CARE OR TEMPORARY HELP**

Finding respite care – temporary care – is another way to cope, including in-home services, facility-based services, day programs, palliative care and sometimes just companionship. For more information, see <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/pubs/homedomicile/2003-respite-releve/index-eng.php>

Also, contact: You can also access community-based programs, including help with transportation and grocery shopping, Meals on Wheels and home cleaning. For more information contact the CCAC, the Community Care Access Centre, at <http://healthcareathome.ca> . They have also produced a specific resource on finding respite care: [http://www.healthcarecan.ca/wp-content/themes/camyno/assets/document/PolicyDocs/2012/External/EN/RespiteCare\\_EN.pdf](http://www.healthcarecan.ca/wp-content/themes/camyno/assets/document/PolicyDocs/2012/External/EN/RespiteCare_EN.pdf).

Another helpful resource site is Seniors for Seniors which is a network of seniors across Ontario providing services to other seniors – driving to medical appointments, housecleaning, drop in, meals etc.. For more information visit [www.seniorsforseniors.ca](http://www.seniorsforseniors.ca)

## **GETTING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

If you feel the need to do everything yourself, but you know you cannot work full time while caring for your parent, you can apply to The Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit provides a basic benefit rate to help cover the costs of some respite care, leaving you some time to take care of yourself. <https://www.canada.ca/en>.

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