

# How to Recognize & Reduce Caregiver Stress

Depending on your personality, past experience, relationship with the person receiving care, and other responsibilities, your feelings may differ from those listed here. While not everyone reacts in the same way, it's important to realize that stress effects every caregiver.



## Common Feelings and Signs of Caregiver Stress

**Guilt** is a common feeling. Maybe you feel guilty because you are considering an Assisted Living community, or you lost your temper. Many people feel guilty because they cannot quit their jobs, or think they should be doing more. Guilt is a major cause of stress in caregiving.

If you feel this way all the time, it's going to affect your decisions. If you don't place someone who needs fulltime professional care in an Assisted Living community because you feel guilty, then you risk not providing the best care and quality of life possible.

Promises made years ago to keep a person at home "no matter what" may no longer be the best situation.

A feeling of **helplessness** is common. It's hard to watch the mental or physical decline of someone you love, and know that you cannot prevent it.

**Anger** often comes from frustration. You may be angry because you're the only family member who wants to help. Perhaps you're mad because your loved one no longer recognizes you, or doesn't appreciate your help. Maybe your anger stems from not knowing what to do.

### Other signs of stress may include:

- depression
- headaches/stomach aches
- difficulty sleeping
- easily upset; cry more often
- catch more colds/flu bugs
- can't concentrate
- withdraw socially, no longer pursue activities you like
- eat, smoke and/or drink more than usual



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## Suggestions to Reduce Caregiver Stress

- 1. Take care of yourself.** Your health is very, very important. Make sure you eat healthy foods and exercise regularly. If possible, take walks with your loved one. Fresh air and exercise will be beneficial for both of you. Try to get enough sleep. If you're up and down all night with your loved one, then sneak in a nap whenever possible.
- 2. Appreciate the here and now.** Don't dwell on what your loved one can no longer do. Focus instead on the activities you can enjoy together, now. Any activity can be meaningful when you concentrate on being together rather than on a skill level.
- 3. Educate your family and friends.** Sometimes people hesitate to help because they don't understand, or don't know what to do. Give family and friends specific tasks when they offer to help. Explain behaviors and limitations so they know what to expect.
- 4. Talk about it.** It's important to discuss how you feel, and what is happening. Support groups are a great place to talk with people who truly understand your situation. Group members can offer advice as well as comfort. There are support groups online and face-to-face.
- 5. Accept help.** *This is the most important way to relieve stress.* Don't hesitate to seek and find help. Once you recognize that every caregiver needs and deserves relief from the responsibilities of caregiving — ask for help. The Alzheimer's Association, Area Agency on Aging, and assisted living providers all have ways for caregivers to obtain respite and relief.



Daytime and overnight care programs are wonderful ways to provide a stimulating social environment for your loved one while giving yourself a break. Utilizing part-time help will make it possible for you to continue to care for your loved one at home. Don't hesitate to use the help and services available. It will help you be the best caregiver you can be.

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Adapted from [www.AlzheimerStories.com](http://www.AlzheimerStories.com)

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