

# Reducing Caregiver Burn-Out

To be an effective caregiver, you must first care for yourself. If you reduce your burdens and keep a healthy balance for yourself, you will be in a better position to care for your loved one.

## Tips to Reduce Caregiver Burn-Out

- Don't take it personally. Remind yourself that any emotionally hurtful behavior on the part of your loved one is a result of illness.
- Take time out to do fun things like taking an exercise class or going on day trips every now and then.
- If friends can't come over, and it is impossible to leave the care situation, take time each day for a phone conversation with a friend or family member. Even a brief chat can lift spirits.
- Set limits for yourself. Let your loved one know what you are capable of giving in terms of time and assistance. You don't need to be confrontational. Simply ask for what you need in ways that honor yourself and others. Use 'I' statements.
- Engage in hobbies or favorite pastimes.
- Quiet your mind through soothing music, prayer, meditation or relaxation.
- Focus on finding one activity a day that brings enjoyment to you. Respite does not have to mean leaving home; it can be taking a momentary break to do something positive.
- Exercise regularly, even if it means finding someone else to provide care while walking or going to an exercise class.
- Eat nutritious meals. Don't give in to stress-driven urges for sweets or drink too much alcohol.
- Get enough sleep. If you are kept up at night, try a nap during the day to make up some sleep.
- Listen and communicate carefully with doctors, seek second opinions and monitor medication schedules. A missed medication or incorrect diagnosis can wreak havoc on stress levels. Be a constant advocate for your loved one.
- To help prepare yourself, get as much information as you can about your loved one's health problems and needs and how they are likely to change over time.
- Cash in your "chits." When others offer help, give them an IOU to be called in at some future time so that you don't feel like you are constantly asking for favors.

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- Consider home modifications or assistive devices that can reduce the amount of assistance needed. Examples include installing grab bars in the bathroom and near the bed, moving supplies to lower shelves, purchasing easy-grip can openers and other utensils, and so on.
- Talk about it. Join a caregiver support group in your area to be able to share your thoughts, feelings and information with others in similar circumstances. Join a local support group or interact with other caregivers in “virtual” support groups on caregiving Web sites if leaving home is difficult (Patients Like Me Parkinson’s Disease Community, Stroke Awareness for Everyone, Alzheimer’s Association).
- Explore community resources such as adult day-care centers, in-home respite care and meal delivery services. This will provide free time for errands and personal time, as well as providing health monitoring, transportation, nursing care and therapeutic recreation for the care recipient.

Contact Visiting Angels of Burlington & Mercer Counties for further guidance and options that can give you a well-deserved break.

**Sources:** [www.americangeriatrics.org](http://www.americangeriatrics.org)  
[www.caringtoday.com](http://www.caringtoday.com)  
[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)