

“He needs me night and day. I can’t even get out to get my hair done. I can’t take this much longer. I need help.”

Take a Break: Finding Respite in Caregiving

It’s a big task. The roles and responsibilities you have as a caregiver can be overwhelming. The hours spent in caregiving often leave little time for leisure and getting away for a while. If you don’t take the time for respite, you may become ill. Then there will be two patients to take care of instead of one.

Because the demands of caregiving can continue indefinitely, it’s important to understand the warning signs of stress and learn how to cope with pressures you may be experiencing.

Warning Signs

- No matter what you do, it doesn’t seem like enough.
- You no longer have any time to be alone for even a little while.
- Your caregiving duties interfere with your work and personal life.
- You find yourself overeating or undereating, abusing drugs or alcohol, or your taking your frustrations out on your care receiver.
- You feel exhausted, resentful, frustrated, and angry all the time.

If you notice some of these warning signs, you are probably reaching caregiving burnout. It’s time to take a break and get support from others.

Seek Respite Care

Respite care is an opportunity for the caregiver to get away from caregiving duties for a few hours or a few days. Persons can come into the home, or the care receiver can be taken to another location to receive care.

Often you can find respite programs in hospitals, nursing homes, home health care agencies, adult day-care centers, religious organizations, and other agencies. To find out which program might be available in your area contact:

- The Illinois Department on Aging Senior Helpline at 1-800-252-8966
- Your local Area Agency on Aging
- Your local senior center

When friends and family offer assistance, let them do something. Also, don't be afraid to request their help when you need to take a break. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Your well-being is important. Even a 20-minute break each day will help reduce stress and prevent burnout.

Caregiving takes a lot of time and dedication. Remember that taking care of yourself benefits not only you, but also your family, your friends, and the care receiver. Meeting your own needs will give you additional strength and energy to complete your caregiving tasks.

List options for respite that you can identify in your community.

When I need respite, I will:

For more information, read:

Aging Parents & You by Eugenia Anderson-Ellis, Mastermedia Limited, 1993.

A Survival Guide for Family Caregivers by Jo Horne, CompCare Publishers, 1991.

Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Aging Parents- 3rd Edition by Claire Berman, Holt Paperbacks, 2005

How to Care for Aging Parents- 3rd edition by Virginia Morris, Workman Publishing Company, 2014.

Taking Care of Aging Family Members by Wendy Lustbader and Nancy Hooyman, the Free Press, 1993.

Written by:

Molly Hofer and Cammy Seguin (retired), University of Illinois Extension Educators, Family Life

This tip sheet is part of a series:

Caregiving Relationships: For People Who Care for Adults

University of Illinois Extension, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Information in this publication is for educational purposes only. References to commercial products or trade names do not constitute an endorsement and do not imply discrimination against similar products.

Issued in furtherance of cooperative Extension Service work, Acts of May 8 and June 20, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunity in programs and employment.

Copyright © 2001 by the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

Authors and publishers have granted permission for copies of this work or parts of this work to be reproduced, provided that (1) copies are distributed at or below the cost of reproduction; (2) the author, the publication, and the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and the relevant division within the college are identified; and (3) proper notice of copyright is affixed to each copy.

Updated 2019