

CAREGIVER SUPPORT AND WELLNESS

A caregiver is anyone who helps someone with a long-term or serious illness. This support can include helping with daily tasks like bathing, dressing, daily chores, or going to the doctor. Anyone can be a caregiver (family, friends, neighbors, or paid helpers) and may/may not live with the sick or disabled person.

Being a full time caregiver can be very exhausting and therefore it is important to know when you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

Caregiver burden is the stress and strain a person feels when looking after a family member or loved one over time. It is quite common, with some studies showing that up to 60% of caregivers experience it. It's important to notice the signs of caregiver burden and take steps to avoid it while caring for a loved one.

Caregivers may be stressed if they have the following symptoms:

1. Feeling overwhelmed, burdened or anxious by the caregiver role
2. Becoming forgetful or unable to concentrate on daily tasks
3. Becoming increasingly irritable or angry
4. Changes in appetite (eating more or less)
5. Feeling sad, hopeless or helpless more often than what is usual
6. Experiencing bodily pains, headaches and becoming sick often
7. Not being able to care for yourself (missing meals, medical appointments and other important engagements)

Here are some helpful tips for caregivers:

1. Notice when you're feeling overwhelmed by the above symptoms
2. Take breaks and spend time with others. Do something you enjoy with loved ones.
3. Be kind and patient with yourself. It's normal to feel angry or frustrated sometimes. Find positive ways to handle these emotions. - Remind yourself that it is normal to feel that way and talk to someone about it (friend, family member or counsellor).
4. Exercise regularly. A short walk for example can lift the mood and boost energy.
5. Seek respite care - Respite care is a temporary break for primary caregivers (it can happen at home or in a temporary healthcare facility).
6. Eat healthy meals and drink plenty of water. Try to prepare meals in advance.
7. Ensure you get enough sleep.
8. Engage in spiritual activities like prayer, journaling, or attending religious gatherings.
9. Find support from others in similar situations. Joining a support group can be helpful.
10. Ask for help. Look for local NGOs or hospices that can assist you.
11. Talk to your doctor if you're struggling and feeling stressed; they can offer additional support and options.

Looking after someone is both rewarding and tough. It's easy for a caregiver to forget their own needs, which can lead to exhaustion. It's important to take time for yourself and ask for help when you need it. Remember, you're not alone—there are resources to help you.

For caregiver support groups or counselling contact CANSA SA 0800 22 66 22



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