

CAREGIVER BURNOUT:
KNOW THE SIGNS
AND GET HELP.



EXPERIENCING CAREGIVER BURNOUT? YOU AREN'T ALONE.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, nearly 20-million Americans are unpaid caregivers for adults above age 64. Caregiving tasks could include almost anything – as simple as giving reminders to take medication and transporting to appointments to more substantial tasks such as bathing or toileting.

The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP states that family caregivers spend an average of 24.4 hours per week providing care. But if you're caring for someone with Alzheimer's or another type of dementia, who likely needs more direct attention and supervision, it's likely you're spending more hours than that providing care. Maybe you're spending nearly every waking minute doing so.

Caring for someone with dementia can be mentally draining and physically exhausting. If you're providing the bulk of care your loved one needs, it's like a full-time job. Just like a job, caregiving is time consuming, can drain your energy and can be frustrating. Unlike an office, it's difficult to leave your "work" at your desk when you come home at night. Work is home! Home is work!



Whether you're an overworked employee or an overworked caregiver – both situations are troublesome and can even be dangerous. If you're working extremely hard, with little help, relief, or a way to manage your stress, it's likely that at some point you may experience caregiver burnout. Caregiver burnout is a very real problem. Burnout in general is a state of emotional, physical and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. According to the Cleveland Clinic, burnout may be accompanied by a change in attitude, from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned. Burnout in general is a common response to feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands.

Caregiver burnout can get even worse if you don't get help. It can even lead to compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue goes beyond burnout. Those experiencing compassion fatigue feel hopeless, pessimistic, disinterested and eventually indifferent to the pain of others. It is characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others. It happens most often to caregivers who are unable to regroup and gain a sense of relief. Burnout is more manageable whereas compassion fatigue goes deeper.



It's well-documented that over time, as a caregiver, your physical and mental health will suffer as a result of everything you're taking on. Your situation may not be sustainable over a long period of time and could ultimately be dangerous – for you and the person you are caring for.

There are numerous statistics that support this. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, spousal caregivers ages 69 to 96 have a 63% higher mortality rate than non-caregivers in the same age group. Additionally, more than one in ten family caregivers reported that caregiving had caused their own physical health to deteriorate, with many mentioning that they've neglected their own health appointments because of their caregiving duties. Some caregivers try to do more than they are physically or emotionally able to handle.

Are you experiencing caregiver burnout? Here are a few serious signs to help you determine if it's time to seek help.



LACK OF SLEEP OR CHANGES IN SLEEP PATTERNS

Those who suffer from dementia may have an irregular sleep cycle. In fact, more than 80% of people with dementia will also experience sleep disturbances, anxiety and wandering, according to Yu-Ping Chang, PhD, Professor at the University at Buffalo School of Nursing. A lack of sleep by the individual with dementia can lead to insufficient rest for the caregiver as well. A study by the University at Buffalo School of Nursing found that most caregiver participants got fewer than six hours of sleep each night and were frequently awakened – as many times as four per hour.

You may also not be sleeping because you're worried your loved one will wander out of the home, fall or hurt themselves if you're not constantly watching them. Not getting enough sleep can affect your mood, memory and health in really surprising ways. It can also lead to depression, weight gain, heart disease and premature death. According to Johns Hopkins researchers, sleep deprivation can lead to your own risk for dementia!



HEALTH PROBLEMS

When you spend the majority of time caring for others, caring for yourself often takes a back seat. A lack of attention to your own needs can lead to negative changes in your own health – maybe you've been missing regular checkups, or other important screenings like a mammogram or prostate exam. Perhaps you aren't spending enough time addressing your mental health. The link between mental and physical health has been well documented. Depression can cause real physical ailments such as back pain, irritable bowel syndrome and make you more susceptible to strokes and certain types of cancer.

Please keep your own health top of mind and prioritize devoting time and resources to addressing it. Taking care of your own health isn't a luxury – it's a necessity. Remember: there is a reason that flight attendants tell you to put on your mask first before you help others – you can't help your loved one, unless you help yourself first.



FINANCIAL STRAIN

Most often, undertaking a caregiving role is unpaid with no benefits. If you must or choose to devote yourself full-time to your loved one, you probably don't have another paying job or you may be working irregular hours to manage a part-time job as well as your caregiving duties in order to get by. According to the AARP, caregivers spend on average 20% of their income on caregiving expenses. This includes home modifications, medications, insurance premiums, additional food and personal supplies and more. Financial stress has a costly impact on your health, relationships and more.



ANGER

Let's be honest, the difficulties of caring for someone else can make you frustrated and angry at times. This is a normal, typical emotion. Particularly if you are new to your role and have lots to learn about the disease, you may find yourself feeling extra frustrated with your loved one. Are they faking this? Why are they so stubborn? Can't they remember?

First, don't beat yourself up. What you are doing is hard. Acknowledge your feelings, forgive yourself for feeling angry and know you aren't alone. Feeling guilty for emotions that are natural and valid won't help fix the situation. Recognizing these feelings and getting help will.



ISOLATION

Sometimes the pivot to becoming a caregiver involves leaving socializing with friends, hobbies and relaxation behind because you feel that instead you must prioritize your caregiving tasks. Withdrawing from activities you love can cause you to become lonely and isolated. It's absolutely pertinent that you take time for yourself and do things that bring you joy. Whether it's practicing yoga, going for a run, getting dinner or drinks with a friend, crafting or even just taking a drive by yourself – please prioritize yourself and your well-being. You are important too.

If you're feeling any of these things, you must work quickly to prevent further harm to yourself. In general, burnout can occur due to a lack of resources and social support. If you're experiencing burnout, it may be time to seek outside resources to help lighten your load. Here are a few suggestions.



CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

If you've never attended a caregiver support group, we encourage you to give it a shot. Many organizations offer this type of support – the Alzheimer's Association, the Family Caregiver Alliance and even your local memory care community. Groups can be hosted in person or online, with differing times meant to fit your schedule. You'll benefit from education, tips and support from experts in dementia care. Additionally, you will get the opportunity to hear from others in a similar situation. We've heard countless stories of caregivers who joined a support group and were able to form a supportive circle in order to help each other with the challenges that caregiving presents. Several even worked out a rotation where one caregiver would take both loved ones so the other caregiver could take a break. To find a group near you, check out one of these resources.

Alzheimer's Association

Support Groups

<https://www.alz.org/help-support/community/support-groups>

AARP

Family Caregiver Resources

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/local/info-2021/state-caregiver-resources.html?intcmp=AE-CAR-R1-C1>

Family Caregiver Alliance

Support Group Listings

<https://www.caregiver.org/connecting-caregivers/support-groups/>



HOME HEALTH CARE

Many companies offer in-home care. Home care companies provide professional support services that help allow someone to live safely in their current environment. A home care provider can help with personal cares such as dressing, bathing, managing medication and more. They also act as a companion or can even help with therapy or rehab services. Care can be provided on a short-term basis (perhaps in the case of a loved one transitioning to home from a hospital or rehab stay) or can be longer-term, with an intention to help manage chronic conditions. Most home care services cost a few hundred dollars a day however, rates can vary based on your area and the cares required.

To find in-home care, try a quick Google search for "home health care near me", consult your loved one's physician, seek out resources from the AARP or look at resources listed on Medicare.gov or caring.com.



RESPIRE STAYS

Taking advantage of respite care may be incredibly helpful. Many memory care communities, including [Serra Sol](#), offer temporary or respite stays if space allows. A respite stay offers you a temporary break from caregiving while your loved one stays for a short time – perhaps as little as a few days up to a few weeks' time if needed. Caregivers often use a respite stay as an opportunity to travel, visit friends or family, make improvements to their home, work, or simply take a break from the demands of full-time caregiving. No matter your reason, there is no need to feel guilty. Everyone – no matter their situation or responsibilities – needs and deserves regular breaks.

While you take some much-needed time for yourself or handle other responsibilities, you can rest assured that your loved one is in good hands. They'll benefit from being cared for in a safe and secure environment by staff who are expertly trained to manage their specific needs. Caregivers in a memory care community are well-versed at handling situations that often arise as a result of dementia. They're trained to cope with sundowning, to provide redirection and more. They offer activities and programming meant to stimulate the mind and body, which makes for a more exciting day and a more restful evening. They can help with personal care needs such as medication management, toileting and more.



DAY STAYS

Day Stays are just like they sound – a stay for the day. A memory care community may be licensed to provide this service themselves or other providers may focus on this exclusively (varies state-by-state). Participants benefit from a safe and secure environment with staff who are specifically trained to care for those with memory loss. This service can offer a needed break to a family caregiver - whether it's just for a few hours or all day. To find a list of providers in your area, consult with your area's Agency for Aging or Eldercare Locators for assistance.



If you've tried all that we've mentioned and are still struggling, maybe it's time for more serious help. Please know that trained memory care professionals are often better equipped to help with those with memory loss. If memory care is something that you're looking to explore, reach out to the team at [Serra Sol](#) about what help and support we may be able to provide to you.





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