

Coping with Caregiver Challenges

Challenge	Symptoms	How to Cope
<p>Stress</p> <p>Stress is the mental and physical reaction to events that upset our balance in life.</p> <p>Chronic stress that doesn't go away can lead to serious health problems over time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Neck and shoulders tighten • Fatigue • Trouble sleeping • Weight change • Stomach upsets • Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco • Fear and worry • Mood swings • Crying spells • Irritability • Depression • Forgetfulness • Poor concentration • Low productivity • Negative attitude • Confusion • Weariness • Boredom • Feelings of isolation • High blood pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep breathing and other relaxation methods • Exercise • Time management • Meditation • Respite care to get breaks • Take help from friends and family when it is offered. • Humor • Keep some things from your previous life that are important to you. • Reward yourself. • Stay in touch with friends. • Set limits. • Join a support group. • Contact a therapist. • Read a book. • Listen to music that lightens your mood.
<p>Sadness, Depression</p> <p>Sadness and grieving are normal responses to the loss of life as you once knew it. Sadness and grieving can lead to depression.</p> <p>Symptoms of depression are a combination of symptoms that interfere with a person's ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities.</p> <p>Major depression is disabling and prevents a person from living normally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling blue • Feeling sad • Withdrawing • Irritability • Constant sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings • Feelings of hopelessness and/or gloom • Feelings of guilt, being worthless, and/or helpless • Bad temper, restless • Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once enjoyable, including sex • Tired and decreased energy • Trouble concentrating • Trouble remembering details and making decisions • Can't sleep, early-morning wakefulness, or too much sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk over your feelings with others, e.g., in a support group. • Keep a journal to explore your feelings. Give yourself a break, by asking for help in caregiving. • Try to rest both your body and your mind. • Find someone who can listen without giving advice or making comments. • Focus on positive relationships in your life – family, friends, and pets. • Know your limits in caregiving. It is okay to seek help from others if caregiving becomes too much for you. • See Chapter 6 for ideas for a back-up plan.

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<p>Sadness, Depression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overeating or appetite loss • Having thoughts of wanting to be dead rather than living in all this pain--"I would rather be dead than deal with all this pain and suffering." • Suicide attempts • Constant aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or stomach problems that do not ease, even with treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Chapter 7 for organizing help from family and friends (Home Care Team). • If symptoms persist, seek professional help. Counseling and/or medications have proven effective in treating depression. • Seek help immediately from medical care staff if you have thoughts of suicide. Seek counseling and/or medications from a provider.
<p>Anxiety</p> <p>Anxiety is excessive worry about life. It is a reaction to stress and can lead to depression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing worry and tension • Viewing problems as overwhelming • Restlessness or a feeling of being "edgy" • Bad temper • Muscle tension • Headaches • Sweating • Difficulty concentrating • Nausea • Needing to go to the bathroom often • Being tired • Trouble falling or staying asleep • Trembling • Being easily startled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use problem-solving methods (see below). • Talk to a friend or family member. • Exercise. • Eat a balanced diet. • Avoid caffeine. • Write in your journal. • If symptoms persist, seek professional help. • Counseling and/or medications can effectively treat anxiety.