

Fostering Social Justice through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide

Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself Caring for a loved one strains even the most resilient people. If you're a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and well-being. By Mayo Clinic Staff

As the population ages, more caregiving is being provided by people who aren't health care professionals. About 1 in 3 adults in the United States provides care to other adults as informal caregivers.

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need, such as an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative. However, family members who are actively caring for an older adult often don't self-identify as a "caregiver." Recognizing this role can help caregivers receive the support they need.

Caregiving is rewarding but stressful

Caregiving can have many rewards. For most caregivers, being there when a loved one needs you is a core value and something you wish to provide.

But a shift in roles and emotions is almost certain. It is natural to feel angry, frustrated, exhausted, alone or sad. Caregiver stress — the emotional and physical stress of caregiving — is common.

People who experience caregiver stress can be vulnerable to changes in their own health. Risk factors for caregiver stress include:

Being female

Having fewer years of formal education

Living with the person you are caring for

Social isolation

Having depression

Financial difficulties

Higher number of hours spent caregiving

Lack of coping skills and difficulty solving problems

Lack of choice in being a caregiver

Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't realize that your own health and well-being are suffering. Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

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Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried

Feeling tired often

Getting too much sleep or not enough sleep

Gaining or losing weight

Becoming easily irritated or angry

Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy

Feeling sad

Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems

Abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications

Too much stress, especially over a long time, can harm your health. As a caregiver, you're more likely to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. In addition, you may not get enough sleep or physical activity, or eat a balanced diet " which increases your risk of medical problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Strategies for dealing with caregiver stress

The emotional and physical demands involved with caregiving can strain even the most resilient person. That's why it's so important to take advantage of the many resources and tools available to help you provide care for your loved one. Remember, if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else.

To help manage caregiver stress:

Accept help. Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would

like to do. For instance, a friend may offer to take the person you care for on a walk a couple of times a week. Or a friend or family member may be able to run an errand, pick up your groceries or cook for you.

Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you, and let the helper choose what he or she would like to do. For instance, a friend may offer to take the person you care for on a walk a couple of times a week. Or a friend or family member may be able to run an errand, pick up your groceries or cook for you. Focus on what you are able to provide. It's normal to feel guilty sometimes, but understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.

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See your doctor. Get recommended vaccinations and screenings. Make sure to tell your doctor that you're a caregiver. Don't hesitate to mention any concerns or symptoms you have.

Respite care

It may be hard to imagine leaving your loved one in someone else's care, but taking a break can be one of the best things you do for yourself as well as the person you're caring for. Most communities have some type of respite care available, such as:

In-home respite. Health care aides come to your home to provide companionship, nursing services or both.

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The caregiver who works outside the home

Nearly 60% of caregivers work outside of the home. If you work outside the home and you're a caregiver, you may begin to feel overwhelmed. If you do, think about taking leave from your job for a period of time.

Employees covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act may be able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a

year to care for relatives. Ask your human resources office about options for unpaid leave.

You aren't alone

If you're like many caregivers, you have a hard time asking for help. Unfortunately, this attitude can lead to feeling isolated, frustrated and even depressed.

Rather than struggling on your own, take advantage of local resources for caregivers. To get started, check out the Eldercare Locator or contact your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to learn about services in your community. You can find your local AAA online or in the government section of your telephone directory.

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Reference

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