

Special Health Matters

Care of the Caregiver

♥ How can caring for a family member with a chronic condition affect me, and how can I avoid negative effects?

Taking care of someone that requires long term and critical care can be very difficult for the person giving the care. It has been documented that there is an increase in alcohol, drugs, and smoking in caregivers. Also there has been a study that showed that 10 percent more people were divorced when they had a child or parent that they had to care for. The positive news is that there are things that can be done to avoid negative effects.

♥ Evaluate the needs of the person you are caring for:

- *What are the needs of the person? Do they need bathing? Can they walk or eat by themselves? Etc...*
- *Once you determine their needs it is time to mark the ones you can help with and how often.*

♥ Evaluate your own needs:

- *In what areas do you need help?*
- *What resources are there to help you? Don't forget community, friends, family, religious affiliations. Write down any names of people who have offered to help with anything.*
- *Make a list of the things that people can help with so when they ask you are ready with some ideas that could really help. Cook a meal, come stay with person for a couple of hours, read to them while you take a much needed nap, etc.*
- *Type out the medicines and daily, weekly and monthly activities for the person. This way you can take it to all of the doctor appointments and you don't have to repeat it each and every time.*
- *Set goals that you need to do in order to make things work for you. Break the goals down to small items that can be achieved in a very short time. Sometimes we look at the bigger goals and it is too overwhelming and it doesn't seem we can ever do it. By breaking it down we can do small things until the goal is completely met.*

♥ How can I take care of myself and reduce stress?

Studies have shown that caregivers have about a 60% increase on being treated for depression. It seems that while taking care of the others we forget to take care of ourselves in the process. It is extremely important to take care of ourselves so we can take care of them. Things that have been proven to reduce stress are exercise, eating healthy, getting enough rest, getting informed, journaling, respite, keeping active socially.

You are responsible for your care first. It is a very important part of the job. It is not selfish to take care of your needs or desires, it is essential. Be sure to look at all the things you can do and are doing. I can walk for 15 minutes; I can do emails while person is sleeping....

Remember, it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver—it's an important part of the job. You are responsible for your care first.

♥ Resources

The selected titles and links below will guide you to some key resources and references.

Full Circle of Care <http://www.fullcirclecare.org/needhelp/careneeds.html>

Caring for the Caregiver: Promoting your own Well being
<http://www.ec-online.net/Knowledge/Articles/caringforthecg.html>

PBS.org "& Thou Shalt Honor"
http://www.pbs.org/thoushalthonor/caregivers/caring_for.html