

Recognizing Caregiver Burnout

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<http://www.senior-helpers.com/services/burnout.asp>

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude - from positive and caring - to negative and unconcerned. Burnout can occur when caregivers don't get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able. Caregivers who are "burned out" may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, and depression. Many caregivers also feel guilty if they spend time on themselves rather than on their ill or elderly loved one.

What are the symptoms?

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| • Withdrawal from friends, family, and other loved ones | Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed |
| • Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, and helpless | Changes in appetite, weight, or both |
| • Changes in sleeping patterns | Getting sick more often |
| • Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring | Emotional and physical exhaustion |
| • Irritability | |

What causes caregiver burnout?

Caregivers often are so busy caring for others that they tend to neglect their own emotional, physical and spiritual health. The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily seem overwhelming, leading to fatigue and hopelessness - and ultimately, burnout. Other factors that can lead to caregiver burnout include:

- **Role confusion** - many people are confused when thrust into the role of caregiver. It can be difficult for a person to separate his or her role as a caregiver from their role as a spouse, lover, child, friend, etc.
- **Unrealistic expectations** - many caregivers expect their involvement to have a positive effect on the health and happiness of the patient. In some cases, this may be unrealistic for patients suffering from a progressive disease, such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.
- **Lack of control** - many caregivers become frustrated by a lack of resources and skills to effectively plan, manage, and organize their loved one's care.
- **Unreasonable demands** - some caregivers place unreasonable burdens upon themselves, in part, because they see providing care as their exclusive responsibility - when, in fact, it does not have to be.
- **Other factors** - many caregivers can't recognize when they are suffering burnout and eventually get to the point where they can't function themselves and may even get sick themselves!

How can I prevent burnout?

- Find someone you trust, such as a friend, co-worker or neighbor, to talk about your feelings and frustrations.
- Set realistic goals: accept that you [may need help with caregiving](#), and turn to others for help with some tasks.
- Be realistic about your loved one's disease, especially if it is a progressive disease like Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.
- Don't forget about yourself! Set aside time for yourself, even if it's just an hour or two. Remember, taking care of yourself is NOT a luxury - it is an absolute necessity!
- Take advantage of outside help like in-home care services. They can provide care to your loved one at various times during the day and week.