

Managing Caregiver Stress



For people caring for a loved one

Read this information to learn:

- who a caregiver is
- what caregiver stress is
- how to know if you have caregiver stress
- how you can help manage caregiver stress
- who to call if you need help



Who is a caregiver?

A caregiver is anyone who gives care and help to someone else. A caregiver may support a spouse, parent, sibling, child or other family member or friend. A caregiver may be giving support to someone else because of health conditions, age, disability or injury.

Caregiving can include many different types of activities, such as:

- cooking, cleaning, shopping and helping someone with their household needs
- helping someone with their day-to-day needs, such as dressing and bathing
- driving or going with someone to health care appointments
- helping someone who needs you in many other ways

You may not see yourself as a caregiver. But if you are giving care and assistance to someone else, it is important to recognize the caregiving work you do.

I'm caring for a loved one. Is it normal for me to feel stressed?

Yes, this is normal. This stress is called caregiver stress. Sometimes, caregivers can feel even more stress than the patients. You may be so busy caring for your loved one that you forget to care for yourself. This can be tiring and stressful.

You may not want to take time away from your loved one to deal with your stress. But feeling too much stress can affect your loved one, too. They may start to see and feel your stress as well. To help your loved one, you need to take care of yourself.

How can I tell if I have caregiver stress?

Sometimes, it's hard to tell how stressed you feel.

Ask yourself if you are feeling these ways:

- I can't get enough rest.
- I don't have time for myself.
- I don't have enough time to be with other family members.
- I feel guilty, hopeless, irritable or angry about my situation.
- I don't do other things anymore, beyond taking care of my loved one.
- I have arguments with the person I care for.
- I have arguments with other family members.
- I cry often and or may have lost interest in some of the things I used to enjoy.
- I worry about having enough money.
- I don't know the best way to care for my loved one.
- I feel my own health has been negatively affected.

If you usually or always feel these ways, you may have caregiver stress.

What are the different kinds of caregiver stress?

You might have one or more of these kinds of caregiver stress:

Physical

Taking care of a loved one can be tiring. You may not have time to eat well and exercise. This can affect your own health. Helping your loved one move around or move from bed to chair can also be hard on your own body.

Financial

It can be expensive to provide care to your loved one. Trying to manage all of the costs can cause stress. Helping others to manage their finances can be complicated and time consuming.

Environmental

You may have gone through many changes to help care for your loved one. How you spend your day or where you live may have changed. These kinds of changes can cause stress and affect how you connect with your personal and professional support networks.

Social

You may be spending so much time with your loved one that you don't have time for other family or friends. Not having family and friends around for support can be stressful.

Emotional

Caregiver stress can cause you to feel:

- helpless/hopeless
- depressed
- lonely
- self-doubt
- embarrassed
- frustrated
- afraid
- overwhelmed

Sometimes, you may also start to feel angry or resentful towards the person you are caring for. These feelings are completely normal. They can cause you to feel guilt and stress, and indicate that you might benefit from additional supports. Knowing the kind of stress you are feeling can help you find the supports and services that are right for you.

What can I do to reduce caregiver stress?

Here is a list of things you can do to help reduce the stress you may be feeling:

Take care of your own physical needs

- Set a self-care routine for yourself:
 - ✓ Try to eat at least 3 healthy meals a day.
 - ✓ Try to exercise for at least 2 or more hours each week. Even a short, brisk walk can make a difference to how you feel.
 - ✓ Try to get at least 7 or 8 hours of sleep each night.
 - ✓ Make sure you keep your medical and dental appointments.
- Talk to your family doctor or another care provider for help if you are having physical symptoms of stress, depression, anxiety or issues with sleeping.

Look into financial and work place support

- Speak to your employer to let them know you may need to go to more appointments than usual. It may help to let them know what is happening in your life. Also find out if your employer has any family caregiver benefits or flexibility, such as a caregiver time-off program.
- Financial help may be available. Talk to your social worker about programs through the government or other agencies that can help you manage all the costs. The back of this booklet also has information on financial programs available.

Daily living

- Try to get help with some of your daily routines.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Focus on what you ARE able to provide, and set realistic goals. Don't try to do everything on your own—no one can do it all.
- Ask for help when you need it and accept help if others offer. Even small things, like someone offering to shovel the walk or pick up groceries, deliver meals or assist with things like housekeeping, can make a difference.

Stay connected with others

- Talk with others who have had similar experiences, like a friend or neighbour. Knowing you are not alone can help you feel better.
- Try a support group. This is a group of people in a similar situation who meet regularly to share their experiences. There are also online discussion groups or other ways to connect with people if you can't easily go somewhere outside your home.
- Talk to your friends and family regularly, and share your feelings with them.
- If you are a member of a cultural or religious community, find out if any programs or support is available through these groups.

Accept your emotions

- Be kind to yourself. Accept how you are feeling and acknowledge that you are doing the best you can.
- If you can't find the time to do things that you need or want to do while your loved one needs care or company, consider respite care. Respite care, which is short-term relief for caregivers, is available to give caregivers some time away to rest or attend to other issues. For more information on respite care, see page 12.

Where can I get more help if I need it?

There are many places you can get help while your loved one is in the hospital. These services are free.

Patient and Family Libraries

UHN's Patient and Family Libraries can provide you with reliable information on many different topics. We offer many free services to help you find the information you need.

Toronto Rehab

Sun Life Patient and Family Resource Centre

Main floor, Room 1-123, 550 University Ave (University Centre)

Phone: 416 597 3422 extension 3558

Email: TorontoRehabHealthInfo@uhn.ca

Spinal Cord Connections Resource Centre (in partnership with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario)

Main Lobby, 520 Sutherland Drive (Lyndhurst Centre)

Phone: 416 422 5644 extension 213

Email: info@sciontario.org

Toronto Western Hospital

Paul B. Helliwell Patient and Family Library

West Wing – 1st floor (Room 419)

399 Bathurst Street

Phone: 416 603 6277

Email: twpfl@uhn.ca

Toronto General Hospital

Peter and Melanie Munk Patient and Family Learning Centre and Library

Level 1, Norman Urquhart Building

585 University Avenue

Phone: 416 340 4800 extension 5951

Email: tgpen@uhn.ca

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Main Floor, Atrium, 610 University Avenue

Phone: 416 946 4501 extension 5383

Email: PatientEducationPMH@uhn.ca

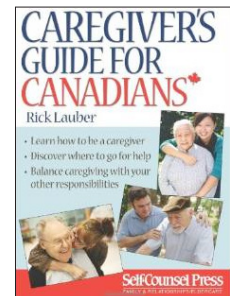
Books and online resources

Caregiver's Guide for Canadians.

By: Rick Lauber

This book can help you explore topics such as:

- The emotions of caregiving – how it feels, what to do and when to ask for help
- Where will everyone live, both for now and the future?
- Tools for success – time management, checklists and workbooks



Community agencies

Many community agencies offer services to help caregivers. Each agency has different eligibility requirements and may not be able to offer all their services to you. Please contact each agency to find out more about what you can access as a caregiver.

Family Service Toronto

Phone: 416 595 9618

Website: www.familyserVICEToronto.org

- Family Service Toronto offers workshops on senior and caregiver support services, and also has counselling services, a caregiver support group and mindfulness seminars to help caregivers adjust to their new role.

211 Toronto

Phone: 211 (across Ontario)

Website: www.211toronto.ca (for Toronto services only)
www.211ontario.ca (in other areas)

- Accessible online or by phone 24 hours a day, operators will help you find information on community, health, social and other government services in your area. Multilingual operators are available.

Community Navigation and Access Program (CNAP)

Phone: 416 217 2077

Website: www.cnap.ca

- CNAP has English and French speaking social workers. They can connect seniors and their caregivers to services such as day programs, home support, crisis assistance and respite care.

Telehealth Ontario

Phone: 1 866 797 0000 (TTY 1 866 797 0007)

- Telehealth Ontario is staffed by registered nurses who can provide non-emergency health advice or information. This service is open 24 hours a day. It is confidential and is available in many languages. You do not need a health card to call.

Respite Services

Website: www.thehealthline.ca

- Respite care gives short-term, temporary relief to caregivers. It can range from a few hours to a few weeks. There may be a charge for respite care. To find respite programs and contact numbers in your area, enter your postal code on the website given here. Then select “People with Disabilities”.

Home and Community Care (formerly CCAC)

Website: www.healthcareathome.ca

- Home and Community Care connects people and caregivers with health services and resources to support them at home and in their community, including respite care. Visit the website to find the nearest branch and enter your postal code or click on the map.

Financial Information – Government Agencies

Finances can be stressful for many caregivers. The Governments of Ontario and Canada have information on disability and sickness benefits. Also check your workplace or private insurance plans to see if you can access any special programs or benefits through them.

Social Assistance in Canada

Website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/caring-someone-ill/benefits-tax-credits-caregivers.html>

- This website will help you find information on various forms of assistance such as the compassionate care benefit or the caregiver tax credit.

Service Canada, Employment Insurance Sick Benefits

Website: www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sc/ei/benefits/sickness.shtml

- This benefit is for people who have contributed to Employment Insurance (EI) and are no longer able to work because of a disability.

Ontario Works (social assistance, welfare)

Website: www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/ow/apply.aspx

- Ontario Works is for people who have little or no income. Ontario Works is often for people who have no disability benefits through their employer and have little or no savings.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Website: www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/odsp

- ODSP is for people who have some or limited savings and cannot return to work due to a medical issue/disability.

Canada Revenue Agency, Canada Caregiver Credit (CCC) and the Infirm Dependent Tax Credit

Website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/canada-caregiver-amount.html>

- Use this website to see if you qualify for caregiver tax credits.

Canada Revenue Agency, Tax Credits and Deductions for Persons with Disabilities

Website: www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/ndvdl/sgmnts/dsblts/menu-eng.html

- This website provides information on the tax credits and deductions that may be available for people with disabilities.

Service Canada, Disability Benefits

Website: www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-disability-benefit.html

- This benefit is for people who have contributed to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and are no longer able to work because of a disability.

Important: This is not a full list of agencies and organizations. University Health Network tries to keep patient education brochures up to date, but some information may change. Please contact any agencies and organizations that may be listed to make sure the information is correct or to find out more about their services.



Have feedback about this document?

Please fill out our survey. Use this link: bit.ly/uhn-pe

Visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca for more health information. Contact pfep@uhn.ca to request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats.

© 2020 University Health Network. All rights reserved. Use this material for your information only. It does not replace advice from your doctor or other health care professional. Do not use this information for diagnosis or treatment. Ask your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. You may print 1 copy of this brochure for non-commercial and personal use only.

Form: D-8523 | Authors: Original content developed by Zofia Kumas & Nancy Boutcher, Occupational Therapy Students, Dalhousie University, August 2001. Adapted by Diana Baylon & Stephanie Phan, Occupational Therapists, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Revised by The Toronto Rehab Patient and Family Education Network, 2014. Acknowledgements: Family Caregivers Voice | Revised: 11/2020