

Caring for the Caregiver

Helping Yourself While Helping Others

It is common to feel stressed and overwhelmed when caring for a loved one with an illness. Like your loved one, you may feel angry, sad, or worried. Try to share your feelings with others who can help you. It can help to talk about how you feel. You can even talk to a counselor or social worker.

Understanding Your Feelings

The first step to understanding your feelings is to know that they're normal. You probably have many feelings as you take care of your loved one. There is no right way for you to feel. Each person is different. Give yourself some time to think through them. Some feelings that may come and go are:

- **Sadness**—It is okay to feel sad. But if it lasts for more than 2 weeks, and it interferes with what you need to do, you may be depressed.
- **Anger**—You may be angry at yourself or family members. Maybe you are angry that your loved one is sick. Sometimes anger comes from fear, panic, or stress. Simply understanding what makes you angry may help.
- **Grief**—You may be feeling a loss of what you value most. This may be your loved one's health or it may be the loss of the day-to-day life you had before the sickness was found. Let yourself grieve these losses.
- **Guilt**—Feeling guilty is common, too. You may think you are not helping enough or you may feel guilty that you are healthy.

- **Loneliness**—You can feel lonely, even in company. You may feel that no one understands your problems. You may also be spending less time with others.

What May Help

Talk with someone if your feelings get in the way of daily life. Maybe you have a family member, friend, or spiritual leader to talk to. Your doctor also may be able to help. Here are some other things that may help you:

- Know that we all make mistakes whenever we have a lot on our minds. No one is perfect.
- Cry or express your feelings. You don't have to pretend to be cheerful. It is okay to show that you are sad or upset.
- Focus on things that are worth your time and energy. Let small things go for now.
- Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can.
- Spend time alone to think about your feelings.

Take Time For Yourself

Taking time for yourself can help you be a better caregiver: even more true if you have health problems. You may want to:

- Find nice things you can do for yourself. Even just a few minutes can help.
- Be active. Even light exercise such as walking, stretching, or dancing can make you less tired.
- Find ways to connect with friends. You can find places to meet others who are close to you, or you can chat or get support by phone or e-mail.

Caring for Your Body

You may feel too busy to think about your own health. But taking care of your body gives you the strength you need to take care of someone else. Keep up with your own health needs. Try to:

- Go to all your checkups.
- Take your medicines.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Get enough rest.
- Exercise.
- Make time to relax.

If you had health problems before you became a caregiver, it is now even more important to take care of yourself. The addition of extra stressors to your life can cause new health problems. Be sure to tell your doctor if you notice any new changes in your body.

- Give yourself more time off. Ask friends or family members to pitch in. Take time to rest.
- Do something for yourself each day. It doesn't matter how small it is. Whatever you do, don't neglect yourself.

If you or someone you know is having a problem, contact MHN—help is available!

Source: National Cancer Institute