

CARE OF CAREGIVERS

Anne LaFleur, LICSW CCTSW

Caregiver Role

- A caregiver is a supportive person who helps their loved one with a chronic illness. The caregiver might be a spouse, significant other, family member or trusted friend
- Caregivers work to enable their loved one to live as independently as possible with the highest quality of life.
- Studies show that caregivers who do not take care of themselves risk burnout, depression, physical illness, abusive behavior, loss of friends and strained family relations.
- Being an effective caregiver involves learning strategies for planning and problem solving and for taking care of yourself

Preparing to be a caregiver

- Planning and problem solving are important skills for the caregiver. Being organized on a daily basis and being ready to handle unexpected situations will reduce stress and help you care for your loved one.



Planning Tips

- Plan your day by assigning priorities and realistic goals
- Identify friends, neighbors and other relatives who are willing and able to help you
- Arrange your day to take full advantage of any available help from supports
- Pace yourself; do not work to the point of exhaustion
- Set limits and stick to them. LEARN TO SAY “NO”
- Develop a partnership with your loved one’s health care providers and get involved in developing any short and long term care plans.

Problem Solving Tips

- You are probably a “pro” with respect to the issues your loved one is experiencing. However, it could be that many of the problems affecting your loved one come with the advancement of the chronic disease and may be new to you



Tips (continued)

- Identify and discuss any problems that currently exist; research local resources available
- Develop a strategy or long term plan if your loved one's condition changes or gets worse. Consider any potential problems and what services may be needed.
- Have the telephone numbers of your loved one's doctors and emergency services (program into your cell phone)

More Tips

- Have a positive attitude toward caregiving
- Take care of yourself and stay healthy
- Know your own limits
- Realize you cannot do everything by yourself and accept help when it is offered
- Ask for help before you feel overwhelmed
- Seek healing, humor, courage
- Be realistic in your expectations for the patient's health and progress
- Be realistic in your expectations about yourself and caregiving

Recognizing Burnout

- 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 do not get the help they need or if they try to do more than they are able, either physically or financially or emotionally.



Symptoms of Burnout

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



How to Prevent Burnout

- Find someone you trust, such as a friend, co-worker or neighbor to talk about your feelings and frustrations
- Set realistic goals and accept that you may need help. Search for support groups (in person or on line) for caregivers.
- Try to set a couple of hours a day for yourself.
- Educate yourself! The more you know about your loved one's condition, the more effective you will be as the caregiver.

Burnout Prevention(con't)

- Develop new tools for coping. Use humor to deal with everyday stress



- Stay healthy by eating right, getting rest and exercise



- Accept your feelings. Having negative feelings such as frustration and anger, are normal
- Join a caregiving support group

Stress



- Stress is a reaction to changes that require you to adjust or respond
- Stress can affect the body's immune system and illnesses can result
- Key to coping with stress is to identify the causes of stress
- Remember that stress comes from how you respond to stressful events

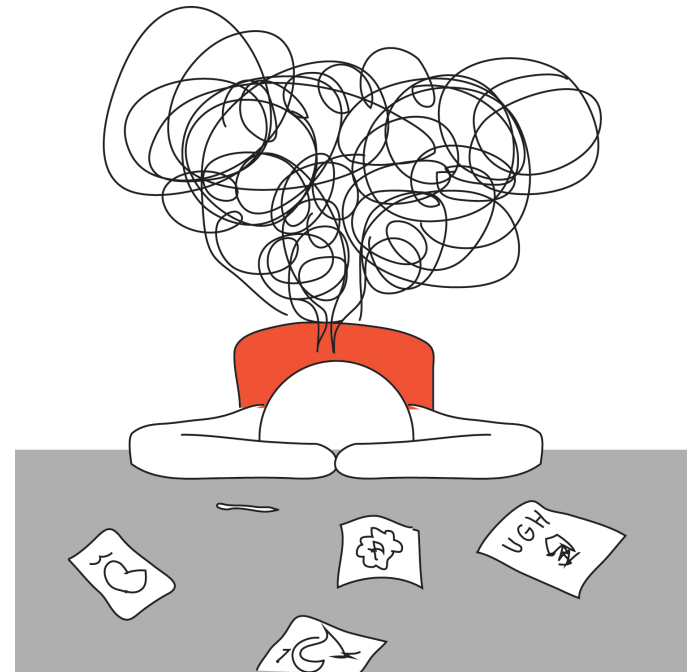
Warning Signs of Stress

- Anger
- Inability to concentrate
- Unproductive worry
- Sadness
- Frequent mood swings



Physical Warning Signs

- Stooped posture
- Sweaty palms
- Tension headaches
- Neck pain
- Chronic back pain
- Weight gain or loss
- Problems with sleep



Behavioral Warning Signs

- Over reacting
- Acting on impulse
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from relationships
- Changing jobs often



Tips on Reducing Stress

- Keep a positive attitude
- Believe in yourself
- Consider relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation
- Exercise regularly
- Eat healthy
- Learn to manage your time
- Make time for hobbies and interests
- Set realistic goals
- Consider counseling or support groups



attITUDE
Makes THE
DIFFERENCE

Relaxation Ideas

- Breathing exercises
 - ✓ Rhythmic breathing: slow it down!! Inhale slowly (count to 5) and exhale slowly (count to 5). Pay attention to how your body naturally relaxes
 - ✓ Deep Breathing: Imagine a spot just below your navel. Imagine breathing in through that spot, filling your abdomen with air. Let the air fill you from the abdomen up and then let it out slowly. Breathing deeply and slowly floods the body with oxygen and other chemicals that work on the central nervous system and improve your comfort.
 - ✓ Visualized breathing: Combine slow breathing with your imagination. Feel the tension leave your body.

Relaxation (con't)

- ✓ Progressive muscle relaxation: 2 steps
 - ✓ 1. focus your mind on a muscle group (i.e: in your hand). As you inhale, squeeze the muscles in your hand (make a fist) as hard as you can for about 8 seconds
 - ✓ 2. release the tension as you exhale. Quickly open your hand and let the pain and tightness go. Feel the muscles relax and become loose and limp. Repeat for all major muscle groups in your body



Relaxation (con't)

- Meditation: meditation can lead to decreases in blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tension that are greater than those that occur during sleep or simple relaxation. There are many tapes and books available (library??) and can help you develop your own meditation program.



Relaxation

- Guided imagery: mental imagery relaxation or guided imagery is a proven form of focused relaxation that helps create harmony between the mind and body. Guided imagery coaches you in creating calm, peaceful images in your mind; a mental escape.
- Imagine a pleasant experience or soothing environment. By concentrating on creating as much detail as possible, the mind becomes absorbed in the task which in turn, lessens stress.

Prayer

- Prayer: a sizeable body of literature has demonstrated the benefits of religious practice on health.



Prayer

*How to do nothing
and still think you're helping*

Hypnosis

- Hypnosis leads a person into what is assumed to be an altered state in which decreased perception of the external environment allows increased focus and access to unconscious parts of the mind. Because evidence suggests its benefits, hypnosis is frequently used to treat addiction, pain, anxiety and phobias.

Other options for Relaxation

- Music therapy
- Art, journaling, dance
- Massage
- Aromatherapy
- Yoga
- Herbal products



Discussion???