

Many caregivers find that support groups help them feel less alone. Support groups provide an opportunity to share openly with others who understand and to learn techniques for coping.

To provide effective care, it's vital that you maintain your health. Neglecting your health has long-range consequences, not only for you, but also for the person who needs your care. Proper diet, sleep, exercise, and attention to your health problems are essential.

All too often, caregivers place their own needs last. Taking breaks from caregiving is essential for both full-time and part-time caregivers. Consider getting breaks early in caregiving. If you wait until you are "burned out" these breaks will not be enough.

Caregiving decisions should not be based only on the needs and desires of the care recipient. You must also consider the consequences of caregiving decisions for yourself and other family members. Making these decisions is an essential part of self-care, which in turn will help you provide effective care for others.

*Adapted from "Coping With Caring" (CFS-455)
Purdue University, Cooperative Extension Service*

*"Approach the throne of grace
 with boldness, so that we may
 receive mercy and find grace to
 help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).*

God of our Life there
 are days when our burdens we carry
 chafe our shoulders and weigh us down;
 when the road seems dreary and endless,
 the skies grey and threatening;
 when our lives have no music in them,
 and our hearts are lonely,
 and our souls have lost their courage.
 Flood our path with light,
 turn our eyes to where the skies are
 full of promise;
 tune our hearts to brave music;
 give us the sense of comradeship
 with heroes and saints of every age;
 and so quicken our spirits
 that we may be able to encourage
 the souls of all who journey with us
 on the road of life,
 to your honor and glory.

Saint Augustine

Resources

Catholic Social Services
614-221-5891

Family Caregiver Alliance
www.caregiver.org

Ohio Assoc. of Area Agencies on Aging
www.ohioaging.org

Hospice Foundation of America
www.hospicefoundation.org

Caring for the Caregiver



Marriage and Family Life Office
 Diocese of Columbus
 197 E. Gay Street
 Columbus, Ohio 43215
 614-241-2560

Marriage and Family Life Office
 Diocese of Columbus

Caring for the Caregiver

Caregivers follow Jesus' example of loving service. If you are caring for another person's well being, you are a caregiver. The need for caregiving may occur suddenly (as in the case of illness or accident) or progress slowly over time. Caregiving can put a strain on you and your family. The amount of stress related to caregiving will depend on the level of physical, cognitive, and social impairment of the care recipient; the quality of the relationship between the caregiver and the care receiver; assistance given by family and friends; and the extent of the disruption of the caregiver's personal and social life due to caregiving.

You are important. You must take care of yourself and manage your stress if you want to be able to continue to care for your loved one. It is important to identify what is causing the stress and if there is something that you can do about it. There is usually some action that can be taken to decrease the stress. Changes do not have to be major to make an important difference.

The basic goals of caregiving are to assure the care receiver's quality of life, physical comfort, and safety. You may be the direct care provider or you may arrange, coordinate, and monitor the services your loved one requires. In setting goals, it is important to consider how caregiving is likely to affect other areas of your life. Preventing caregiver burnout means accepting the limitations of what you can accomplish.

You will see results more often if you select goals that are specific and achievable. Specific goals are short-term and focused on a clear problem. If you only have broad long-range goals, you are more likely to experience frustration.

Have realistic expectations. Caregivers frequently struggle to balance their self-expectations with what they can actually achieve. Sometimes we expect too much from ourselves and we get into a state of constant worry or anxiety because we think we are not doing what we should.

Sometimes old promises drive us to do more than is realistic. Promises can get in the way of objectively assessing the current situation. Compare the current situation to the situation when the promise was made. The promise made under one situation may not be viable under the current situation because of changes in your loved one's health or in your life circumstances.

You have a right to set limits on what you will do. Providing care at the expense of your mental and physical health or relationship with other family members does not benefit anyone. When you set limits it is important to communicate them to your family and to the care recipient. Discussing limits in caregiving is usually easier if you consider other ways to meet your loved one's needs. Share information about those options at the same time you talk about your limits.

Ask for and accept help. Resistance to accepting help is a common cause of stress and depression among caregivers.

In our culture, with its emphasis on "independence" and "doing it alone," it is not easy to request help. Some caregivers view asking for help as a sign of helplessness, inadequacy, or failure. Reaching out for assistance before you exceed your limits is an important characteristic of a strong individual. It also helps ensure quality care for your loved one.

People can best help you if you tell them exactly what your needs are and how they can help. Be specific and positive. When family and friends ask how they can help, make specific suggestions. Tasks unrelated to caregiving may be easier for some people. If you can be flexible, ask when would be the best time for them. It's also important to show appreciation for any help received. Let people know how much their support means to you.

In order to take care of yourself, find someone with whom you can talk openly about your situation and your emotions. Being a caregiver and seeing the decline of a loved one is not easy.

Stress has fewer negative effects for people who admit their feelings and accept them. Feelings are normal. When you acknowledge and understand your emotions you can control them. Repressing and denying feelings decreases energy, and can cause irritability, depression, or physical problems. Your feelings can also greatly influence your judgment. Some feelings are hard to share directly. If this is true for you, find an indirect way such as writing it down or getting involved in vigorous physical activity.