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Caregiver Burnout: Steps for Coping With Stress

[En español](#)

Recognize the causes and symptoms so you can get the help you need

Taking care of a loved one who has [dementia](#), physical disabilities or other age-related conditions makes demands on your time, energy and emotions. More than half of caregivers told AARP that caregiving increased their level of stress, worry and anxiety as well as making them concerned for the future.

You may find you have less patience and more fatigue, along with feelings of frustration and guilt. The daily act of caregiving can become a grueling grind, taxing your mind and body and leading you to caregiver burnout.

Impact of caregiving

The effects on physical and mental health are well documented:

- In a 2023 report, AARP found that 40 percent of all caregivers cite the emotional stress of juggling caregiving and working as their biggest challenge.
- More than half of caregivers find that caregiving makes it hard to take care of their own mental health in AARP's 2023 "[A Look at Caregivers' Mental Health](#)" report.
- According to the same report, nearly 4 in 10 caregivers say they never or rarely relax. And 40 percent say caregiving makes them feel alone.
- Half of caregivers had suicidal ideation during the pandemic, nearly a quarter said their own health has worsened, and 14 percent say they have frequent mental distress according to a 2023 report on caregiver burnout by Seniorly.

Signs of caregiving burnout

That's why it's so important to watch for signs of caregiver burnout symptoms. The Alzheimer's Association says these are 10 signs that a caregiver may be

experiencing a high level of stress:

1. Anger or frustration toward the person you're caring for
2. Anxiety
3. Denial about your loved one's condition
4. Depression
5. Exhaustion that makes it tough to complete your daily tasks
6. Health problems, such as getting sick more often
7. Inability to concentrate that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks or causes you to forget appointments
8. Irritability and moodiness
9. Sleeplessness
10. Social withdrawal from friends and activities that you used to enjoy

Another tool to evaluate whether tending to a loved one is taking a toll is a [caregiver self-assessment questionnaire](#) that the American Medical Association developed and the American Psychological Association recommends.

Causes of caregiver burnout

Along with the heavy workload and emotional demands of family caregiving, these issues also can contribute to burnout.

- **Conflicting demands** as you try to balance the needs of the care recipient, coworkers and employers, family members, and yourself.
- **Lack of control** over money and resources and a lack of the skills needed to effectively manage a loved one's care.
- **Lack of privacy** because caregiving may leave you with little time to be alone.
- **Role confusion**, difficulty separating your roles as caregiver and as the parent, sibling or spouse of the care recipient.
- **Unreasonable demands** placed upon a caregiver by other family members or the person being cared for.
- **Unrealistic expectations** about the effect caregiving efforts will have on loved ones with progressive diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

Sources: Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine

Tips on managing caregiver stress

If you are beginning to feel overwhelmed, or are already experiencing any of the symptoms of burnout listed above, these steps may provide relief:

- **Ask for help.** Even if you aren't able to get away for long, ask a friend or relative to fill in for you for a few hours occasionally so you can take a walk, watch a movie or go out to dinner.
- **Look into respite care.** If you don't have that sort of informal support available or feel you need more structured respite care, look into other options through the [National Respite Locator](#). This online service provided by the nonprofit Access to Respite Care and Help National Respite Network can help you find [adult day care centers](#) and [home care services](#) in your area.
- **Simplify your communication.** Keeping extended family and friends up to date about your loved one's situation through phone calls or individual emails can be tiring, and you may not want to broadcast that information on social media. Websites such as CaringBridge, PostHope or MyLife Line allow you to post updates for everyone simultaneously with controls to protect your loved one's privacy.
- **Nurture positive relationships.** You may be overwhelmed, but take the time to talk with your closest friends and family members. Spend an evening with someone who is a good listener. Limit your interactions with negative people who drag down your mood and perspective.
- **Take care of yourself.** Set a goal to establish a [good sleep routine](#), eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water. See your doctor for recommended immunizations and screenings.
- **Talk to your physician.** Tell your doctor that you're a caregiver, and bring up any concerns you may have. They may be able to [refer you to a therapist](#) who specializes in helping caregivers manage stress.
- **Remember to move.** Daily exercise such as yoga, aerobics or even a short walk — if you are able to leave the house — can make a difference in your well-being. More than half of caregivers surveyed by AARP in 2023 reported that exercising helped them cope with stress.
- **Try meditation.** A daily relaxation, breathing or meditation practice may be beneficial as well. The practice can help slow heart rates and has been shown to lower blood pressure. There are apps available on smartphones and tips online that can [guide you through sessions](#).

Where to get help

Whether in person or online, you can find organizations that specialize in supporting caregivers.

- **Local programs.** The U.S. government's [Eldercare Locator](#) can connect you with your local Area Agency on Aging, which can guide you to resources in your community to help you deal with the challenges you are facing. You also can call the Eldercare Locator at 800-677-1116. The [Community Resource Finder](#), an online database from AARP and the Alzheimer's Association, allows you to find a range of programs and services in your area, from elder law attorneys to transportation. The [Family Caregiver Alliance has a site](#) that can help you locate resources in your state.
- **Support groups.** If you feel like you're alone in your struggle, talking with other family caregivers can lift your spirits and help you think through solutions to various problems. You may be able to find a support group through a local church or hospital, or at the website of the [Well Spouse Association](#), which coordinates a national network of groups for spousal caregivers.
- **Dementia-specific care.** If you're taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, the Alzheimer's Association offers a [locator for support groups](#) in your area.
- **Online forums.** AARP has an [online caregiving forum](#) and a [Facebook discussion group](#) where caregivers can share information and advice.

Editor's note: This article, published on Oct. 21, 2019, has been updated with more recent research findings on caregiver stress.

AARP was founded in 1958 and has over 38 million members. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for people over the age of 50. AARP is well-known for its advocacy efforts, providing its members with important information, products and services that enhance quality of life as they age. They also promote community service and keep members and the public informed on issues relating to the over 50 age group.

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