

Caregiver Role Strain

A caregiver is someone who provides care for a person. This handout describes the strain this role can have on their mental health.

Caregiver role strain is when caregivers find it hard to perform their roles or feel stressed because of:

- Financial burdens
- Increased responsibility
- Change in family life
- Role change

Signs of Strain

- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Excessive anger
- Health problems
- Sleep problems (too much or not enough)
- Feeling very tired
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Feeling irritable
- Change in appetite
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Crying easily or for no reason
- Loss of interest in sex
- Moody

This Feeling Is Normal

It is normal to feel strain. It is not easy to care for someone with an illness. It is normal to feel lonely, angry, or guilty.

Ways to Help Yourself

Organize your life. Write down your daily routine. Put the list in the order of importance. It is okay to change your priorities when something out of your control happens. Have easy access to the person's health records and make sure they

are in order. Have a list of phone numbers, medicines, and other important information. Know your limits. Know that there are things you cannot control.

Build a support team. These are people you can count on at any time. Do **not** be afraid to ask for help. Accept help if someone offers. Your support team may include family members, friends, chaplain, counselor, nurse or doctor. Make sure to talk with your support team about your feelings. Keep a journal.

Take time out for yourself. Spending time with family and friends is a great way to relax. We also suggest you use home health care, family, friends, or respite care. It is okay for you to take time to enjoy your favorite pastime at least once a week. The support from others is the key to your success.

Eat healthy meals every day. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plenty of water are a great way to start. Use your favorite foods during stressful times as a comfort food. Prepare extra portions and place them into containers to freeze for a quick meal. Consider Meals on Wheels and other programs that provide healthy meals at a small charge delivered right to your home.

Look at the positive. Take pride in what you know and what you can do. Although giving care can be hard, you are doing great things for your loved one. Use humor.

Find time together. You are a team. Talk about the care you provide and your relationship. Find time together to do things you enjoy. You could go for a picnic or on a date.

Take care of your own health. Taking care of someone takes a lot of energy. Allow yourself to take a break from care giving. It is healthy for you and your loved one. To care for someone, you also need to care for yourself. To care for yourself:

- Get plenty of sleep.
- Exercise often.
- Do quick stretches to help reduce tension and maintain muscle tone.
- Keep your faith.
- Keep doing the things you enjoy.
- Don't forget to laugh.

Other Resources

Talk with a member of your health care team if you are feeling any symptoms of strain. We've included a list of resources that may be helpful.

When your loved one's life changes, so does yours.

Share the Care

Book by Cappy Capossela and Sheila Warnock

Fireside, 2004

<https://sharethecare.org/>

Area Agency on Aging of Dane County

<https://www.dcdhs.com/Area-Agency-on-Aging>

Caregiver.com

www.caregiver.com

Read issues of Today's Caregiver Magazine

Family Caregiver Alliance

www.caregiver.org

Bilingual information in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

Eldercare Locator

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6921