



Understand and Recognize the Signs Of Caregiver Stress & Overwhelm

Providing care and support for someone living with memory loss is probably one of the hardest roles in which you will ever engage. Assisting with daily activities like dressing, grooming, bathing, and walking is physically challenging. Maneuvering through the maze of medical and social services can be trying and time-consuming. Watching your loved one's ability to care for him/herself deteriorate is emotionally difficult. And the changes in your personal, social, and work life due to your caregiver role may leave you feeling confused, unhappy, frustrated and/or angry. These stresses can pile up on even the strongest of individuals and negatively impact physical and mental health.

It is so important to recognize when the frustrations you are feeling go beyond your ability to manage, and into what is often called caregiver burnout. When you are able to identify the warning signs and learn interventions to reduce stress levels, your caregiving tasks can become more manageable.

Here are some warning signs of Caregiver Stress associated with memory loss:

- Being in denial about the disease and its impact on you and the person living with memory loss
- Being on the verge of tears or crying a lot
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Overreacting to minor nuisances
- Feeling constantly exhausted
- Losing interest in or having decreased productivity from work
- Withdrawing from social contacts
- Increasing use of alcohol or stimulants
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Inability to relax
- Scattered thinking and trouble concentrating
- Feeling increasingly resentful
- Being short-tempered with care recipient frequently
- Feeling anxious about the future
- Noticing changes in your own health
- Increasing thoughts of death

You may not always recognize the signs of stress and overwhelm in yourself, but those close to you probably will. Be open to your friends' and families' feedback about how you are doing. Heed the warnings and ask for help.

Once you have recognized that you are experiencing burnout you can try various things to help you cope. Here are some suggestions:



- Reach out for help by developing a support network. Find family and friends with whom you can share your thoughts, feeling, frustrations and joys.
- Consult with a professional counselor for one-on-one counseling.
- Attend a support group to receive positive feedback and coping strategies from others in similar situations.
- Maintain good health by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet.
- Take regular time out for journaling, meditating, visualization and contemplation.
- Stay involved in hobbies and activities you enjoy.
- Educate yourself on the disease and its progression.
- Learn what resources are available in your community. Knowledge is power.
- Deep breathe several times a day.
- Make sure you have a solid legal and financial plan.

When you understand and acknowledge that being a caregiver may leave you feeling stressed and anxious you are better able to protect yourself against the negative impacts of caregiving. The most important thing you can do to be an effective caregiver and to reduce stress and overwhelm is to take care of yourself!

For more information on this and other caregiver topics, please contact Memory Keepers at info@memorykeepers.org or MemoryKeepers.org