



6 Signs of Caregiver Burnout

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Survive&Thrive

Are you at the end of your rope? Here's what you can do about it
AARP, December 31, 2011

You probably know all the details about the health of the person for whom you're caring. You're on top of what medications must be taken and when, and you can even spot minor changes in her mood and attitude. Are you as aware of what's going on with you?

Probably not. When you're caring for a loved one, it's easy to forget about your own needs, putting you at serious risk of burnout. Here are six signs that you've reached the end of your rope — and suggestions on what you can do about it.

1. You feel furious one minute, sad and helpless the next. Whatever you call it — second-hand stress or the more serious caregiver burnout — the despairing mix of physical and emotional exhaustion strikes many caregivers at one time or another. As you ride the emotional rollercoaster of caregiving, you're easily overwhelmed and angry. You can't eat or you eat too much. You're exhausted even after a night's sleep. Your brain is foggy and you no longer care about the things that used to bring you joy.

The fix: Your life has changed in profound ways, so it's natural to feel frustrated and to grieve for what you have lost. But untreated anxiety or depression is serious, and you can't take good care of anyone if you don't take of yourself.

First, check in with your doctor to rule out any medical conditions that can trigger symptoms of mental health problems. Let your doctor know that you are a caregiver and might [need support](#) to be able to continue in this role. Finally, remind yourself that while you are doing everything you can, you will never do everything — and that's OK too.

2. You catch every bug that comes your way. Stress doesn't just make you anxious and depressed. It takes a toll on [a toll on your immune system](#). If you are getting sick more often and staying sick longer than you used to, your body is trying to tell you something. Listen up.

The fix: Don't let routine checkups slide because you don't think you have the time. See your primary care doctor and your dentist regularly. Ditto for [immunizations](#), mammograms and other recommended screenings. [Eating a nutritious diet](#) and getting at least seven hours of sleep a night boosts your body's natural defenses.



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3. You're snapping at everyone. When you feel helpless and overwhelmed, you're more likely to overreact to the things people do, or don't do. Like a toddler having a tantrum, you need a timeout.

The fix: Don't set the bar so high that you can never meet it. Pick up the phone and make a call to a friend. Studies show that simply giving voice to your frustrations and fears dials down tension and eases the isolation that shadows caregivers.

Mapping out a daily routine that you try to stick to will also give you a greater sense of control. Prioritize your to-do list, whether it's grocery shopping or taking Mom to a doctor's appointment. Don't worry about things lower down on the list that don't get done.

4. You know you should exercise, but you just don't have the time. No one functions well in crisis mode day after day. Caregiving is a marathon, not a sprint. You need to find a way to dial down the tension.

The fix: Force yourself to get moving. Exercise is the best stress reliever. Not only will you feel better right away, the surge of endorphins that exercise triggers lifts your mood, clears your head and helps you sleep better at night. A brisk 30-minute walk or jog on the treadmill, even a 10-minute walk around the block, jump-starts your brain, soothes nerves and powers up your immune system.

5. You can't remember the last time you met a friend for dinner or a movie. Everyone needs a break from time to time, so why don't you give yourself one? Caregivers — motivated by a mix of love, loyalty and a dash of guilt — rarely do.

The fix: We are not suggesting a two-week Caribbean cruise, though that would be lovely, right? An overnight visit with a college friend, a night at a bed and breakfast, even a few hours to write in your journal, sip a cup of hot tea while you read a book or watch reruns of your favorite sitcom, can be restorative. One caveat: Taking a break doesn't mean running errands or doing chores. It's you time.



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6. You're the go-to caregiver. Always. This may be the hardest jobs you'll ever have, and it can take time to adjust and come to terms with it. But try going it alone and you'll quickly hit bottom.

The fix: Establish a network of relatives, friends or people in the community you can call on. Schedule a family meeting or video chat about who does what and who pays for it. Let everyone know you will not be available to host holiday meals, organize the church book drive or any other draining activities that you've normally handled. Keep a to-do list with you and whip it out when others ask if they can help. Your neighbor might be happy to spend a few hours at your house while you go to the gym. A friend can buy groceries when she's at the store.

Meanwhile, join a local or online support group so you can connect with sympathetic ears and glean ideas for coping better. Be aware that there are a wide range of programs and professionals out there who can help make the job easier for you.