

Who is a Caregiver?

Someone who takes care of a person who is young, old, sick, or disabled (having an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult for them to do some things that other people do), either as a family member or friend, or as a job

No matter the amount of care needed, stress is part of the job. A 2020 study by AARP found that nearly one in four family caregivers say that caregiving has affected their health. Some caregivers get depressed or angry. Others put off doctor's visits or have trouble maintaining healthy habits. But some caregivers find satisfaction and even pleasure in their duties.

Personality Traits of a Good Caregiver

Patience. People who need care often take longer to complete simple tasks. They may ask the same questions over and over. Good caregivers need patience to deal with anything from a loved one's memory lapses to angry outbursts. They practice staying calm and avoiding frustration.

Compassion. Empathy and understanding are absolutely necessary. Even when caring for an abusive person, caregivers try to remain empathetic and understanding.

Humor. Finding something to laugh about can make a tough situation bearable. A sense of humor keeps a caregiver emotionally strong and is a great stress buster.

Being Present. Good caregivers know the importance of respecting their loved one's current abilities. Rather than focusing on what their loved one can no longer do, a good caregiver tries being in the moment with them—looking at photos, listening to music, cooking a favorite meal, remembering that they weren't always sick.

Detail Oriented. Good caregivers are good managers. They create schedules, plan for emergencies, and organize information so they don't have to scramble.

Able to Accept Help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. A good caregiver realizes they can't do it all alone. They line up friends, family, or professionals to step in when they need a break.

Willing to Set Boundaries. A caregiver should respect their own limits and say "no" to demands when necessary.

Cooperative. A good caregiver is part of a care team that may include doctors, family, and friends. Being understanding and flexible goes a long way toward being a successful team player.

Assertive. Good caregivers advocate for their loved ones. They ask questions and expect answers. Good caregivers learn about their loved one's condition, and they make sure their loved one gets the care they need.

Ten Symptoms of Caregiver Stress

1. Denial about the disease and its effect on the person who has been diagnosed.
2. Anger at the person with Alzheimer's or frustration that he or she can't do the things they used to be able to do.
3. Social withdrawal from friends and activities that used to make you feel good.
4. Anxiety about the future and facing another day.
5. Depression that breaks your spirit and affects your ability to cope.

6. Exhaustion that makes it nearly impossible to complete necessary daily tasks.
7. Sleeplessness caused by a never-ending list of concerns.
8. Lack of concentration that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks.
9. Health problems that begin to take a mental and physical toll.
10. If you experience any of these signs of stress on a regular basis, make time to talk to your doctor.

Five Tips to help Caregivers Cope

Manage your level of stress. Stress can cause physical problems (blurred vision, stomach irritation, high blood pressure) and changes in behavior (irritability, lack of concentration, change in appetite). Note your symptoms and discuss with a doctor, as needed. Try to find relaxation techniques that work for you.

Be realistic. The care you give does make a difference, but many behaviors can't be controlled. Grieve the losses, focus on positive times as they arise, and enjoy good memories.

Know you're doing your best. Remember that the care you provide makes a difference and that you are doing the best you can. You may feel guilty because you can't do more, but individual care needs change as caregiving progresses. You can't promise how care will be delivered, but you can make sure that the person with the disease is well cared for and safe.

Take a break. It's normal to need a break from caregiving duties. No one can do it all by themselves. Look into respite care to allow time to take care of yourself.

Accept changes as they occur. People's needs who require care change over time. They may require care beyond what you can provide on your own. Becoming aware of community resources and care options — from home care services to residential care — can make the transition easier. So will the support and assistance of those around you. Be familiar with available resources.

Resources to Assist with Caregiving

- Alzheimer's Association, 24-hour helpline 800.272.3900, www.alz.org/gmc
- Area Agency on Aging 1B, (800) 852-7795, www.aaa1b.org
- OPC Social and Activity Center, Adult Day Care, 248- 656-1403, www.opccenter.org
- Quality of Life Adult Day Care, (248) 364-4064, www.qualityoflifecenter.net
- Comfort Keepers Home Care, 1130 Tienken Ct #203, Rochester Hills, MI 48306, (248) 206-0314, open 24 hours, www.comfortkeepers.com
- Visiting Angels, 3965 Auburn Rd, Rochester Hills, MI 48309, (248) 649-8890, open 24 hours, www.visitingangels.com
- Heavenly Homecare, 1460 Walton Blvd. #203a, Rochester Hills, MI 48309, (248) 310-3807

Downsizing and Moving:

- Location Specialists: Parents Changing Spaces, Rochester, 248-318-5870, www.parentschangingspaces.com
- H.O.M.E. Senior Moving Services, moving, packing, unpacking, cleaning, painting, estate sale, minor repairs, selling of home. 888-880-1656, www.HomeInfoDesk@gmail.com