



THERAPY NEWS

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Caring for Caregivers

According to a survey by the National Family Caregivers Association, more than 50 million Americans care for a family member or friend with a chronic illness, disability or advanced age (APA, 2006). By 2030, the US population of folks age 65 or older will increase, which means care giving situations are on the rise. While caregivers can gain a sense of life enrichment from helping others, there are definite costs. Disruption of caregiver's wellbeing may involve their own physical and psychological ailments, financial stressors and social isolation. Tasks may include managing finances, medications, transportation and the activities of daily living for the unwell. When caregiver strength declines, it effects the recipient's health, likely institutionalism and potentials for neglect. Caregivers need some practical solutions, such as education about how to cope with all the various

stressors. Other types of assistance could be familiarity with local resources, such as adult day care and means of transportation allowing caregivers to work or rest. Discerning family members who can help by predictably providing respite is so essential. Another source of aid could be locating government funding for caregivers to help with financial costs of care. State specific and/or national organizations can give specialized information in directing families to resources for broader support. Employee Assistance Programs and hospitals can also provide helpful ideas. Another great fund of encouragement would be a good local support group. These groups can serve to combat the caregiver's isolation and burnout, as well as to provide pooled resources. For those in rural areas, there are many specific online support groups available.



*The ultimate lesson
all of us have to
learn is
unconditional love,
which includes not
only others,
but ourselves
as well.*

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Groups can help folks to identify personal stressors, aid in formulating acceptable solutions to many difficult problems and provide a safe place to share with others who can relate to caregiver struggles. Discussing their personal and family roles, communication styles and self-care suggestions with a knowledgeable group leader is essential to helping the caregiver maintain good mental and physical health, which is a benefit for all.

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Strategies for Stress Management

- **Understand how you experience stress:**
How do you know when you are anxious? Do beliefs and behaviors vary from times when you aren't overwhelmed?
- **Identify stressors:**
Which event/situations trigger worried moods?
- **Recognize how you deal with undue pressure:**
Are unhealthy choices made as a result of feeling snowed under?
- **Find beneficial ways to manage stress:**
Consider healthier, stress-reducing activities, like exercising, walking or talking thing out with friends or family.
- **Professional support:**
Accepting help from friends or family improves your ability to persevere during hectic times. If you continue to feel inundated by stress, talk to a mental health professional who can help manage stress and change some of your unhealthy behaviors.

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Resources

Family Caregiver Alliance. Kentucky Assistance:
http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/fcn_content_node.jsp?nodeid=2092

Caring for Caregivers (APA, 2006):
<http://www.apa.org/monitor/nov06/caregivers.aspx>

A Practical Guide to Caring for Caregivers (AAFP, 2000):
<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2000/1215/p2613.html>



*Summer Afternoon, Summer Afternoon;
to me those have always been the two most beautiful words
in the English language ~ Henry James*

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Overwhelmed Moms

As Mother's Day approaches, it is fitting to recognize women's stressful multiple roles to bring awareness to managing them in healthier ways. A 2010 survey by the American Psychological Association found that stress was on the rise for women, as they reported increased levels of physical and emotional symptoms related to their responsibilities. Many of us have heard about the 'sandwich generation' where middle-aged females find themselves in charge of caretaking children and aging parents simultaneously. Women make approximately 80% of health care decisions for their families and are more likely to be a caregiver when members fall ill (APA, 2011). Females also report feeling extreme stress due to failing to handle the pressure of responsibilities in healthy ways, which takes a toll of their relationships and wellbeing. According to Lynn Bufka, an APA psychologist, "People who handle stress in unhealthy ways may alleviate symptoms of stress in the short term, but end up creating significant health problems over time, and ironically, more stress," (APA, 2011). So it is important that females learn how to manage their personal stressors well. Every person experiences and deals with their demands differently, so it is imperative that females become familiar with what bothers them the most.

Identifying which events, situations, people or topics cue stress reactions can create awareness of when to take pause and apply changes. It is useful to become conscious of poor choices created by the sense of overwhelm. For example, picking up unhealthy fast food as a shortcut when there are too many errands and not enough time. A helpful mindset women can adopt is to give themselves permission to say "NO" to the less crucial requests, delegate tasks to family and friends and just take a break. Learning to avoid taking on too much at once, prioritize by focusing on what is truly important and giving oneself time to exercise and socialize serves to buffer stress. Inadequate stress management is a habit that takes time to change. Start by choosing a single bad pattern to alter at a time for greater success, as victory in one area can spur one on to make other meaningful adjustments. Many times, mothers sacrifice their own needs in order to successfully manage their families. However, repercussions of this victim-like attitude is that it models detrimental behaviors for the rest of the family unit. Begin to incorporate a healthy internal dialogue that gives consent for taking the pressure off having a 'perfect' house or being the 'perfect' mother.

No one expects you to be a **Superwoman**.