



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Preventing Caregiver Burnout

“Caregiver burnout” occurs when a family caregiver becomes physically and emotionally depleted from caring for their family member or friend. When the caregiver’s own needs are not met, they can become irritable, exhausted, resentful and anxious. This can put the caregiver at risk for becoming ill. If you are “burnt out” it is unlikely that you will be able to provide the type of quality care for your family member that you hope to.

Some common warning signs of caregiver burnout are:

- Anger and impatience directed at the care recipient
- Denial about the care recipient’s condition and how it affects them
- Withdrawing socially, losing touch with friends
- Feeling dread about facing another day
- Crying easily. Feeling helpless and out of control
- Exhaustion, difficulty sleeping and always tired
- Having trouble concentrating
- Getting sick more than usual: colds, back pain, depression

It is vital that you maintain your own health and well-being while caring for another. There are a number of things you can do to stay refreshed and recharged. To avoid caregiver burnout, it’s important to get help **before** caregiving becomes overwhelming.

Some tips to avoid burnout include:

Take care of yourself: Common self-care techniques include exercise, healthy eating, sleeping well, quiet time, taking time out to do activities that you enjoy, connecting with others, sharing feelings, and asking for help. You are not being selfish when you take care of yourself.

Have realistic expectations: Be realistic about what you can or cannot do. Accept that you can provide a certain level of care but you cannot do everything by yourself. Know when to ask for help and be willing to share the care.

Reach out and accept support: Ask family members or friends to help with some of the day-to-day tasks. Contact community organizations that provide respite care and services for family caregivers. Attend a support group where you can share your concerns and receive support from others in a similar situation.

Gather information Learn as much as you can about your family member’s health problems and how their needs are likely to change over time. This will help you plan and prepare for these changes.

Make adaptations to the home: Making simple changes around the home or using some of the assistive devices that are available can allow the person you are caring for to do more things for him or herself. Examples include: putting a seat in the shower or grab bars in the bathroom and near the bed. See my December 2007 article for more ideas.

Put yourself in their shoes: Try to put yourself in the other person's place to understand why someone may resist care. What might it be like for them to now be dependent on others for simple daily activities, be in constant pain or discomfort and have little privacy?

Have a sense of humour: Laughter helps puts things into a positive perspective and relieves stress. Go out and simply have some fun.

By Barbara Small, Program Development Coordinator, Family Caregivers' Network