Sutter Health

Avoiding Caregiver Burnout

Caregivers need care, too. Learn strategies to reduce your stress and feel more in control.

As a caregiver, you're great at supporting others, but at times, your own well-being can be overlooked. Ignoring your needs increases your risk for burnout, illness and depression. "Caregivers often feel powerless," says Frances Huang, a medical social worker at Mills-Peninsula. However, there are proven ways to make caregiving less stressful and more sustainable.

Create a Master Calendar

Start by keeping a record of what you do each day — for your loved one and for yourself. This can help you see if your routine is realistic or if it's time to make adjustments. It may lead to helpful questions, like: Can someone else assist? Is adult day care an option? Are there tasks that can be skipped or simplified? A detailed calendar can also make it easier to communicate specific needs with family members or health professionals.

Schedule Regular Time Off

Once your calendar is in place, you may notice how little personal time you actually have. Setting aside regular time off — such as one consistent day each week — can be incredibly beneficial. Having a predictable break, like knowing you're free every Saturday, is often more effective for recharging than occasional time off without a set schedule.

Learn to Ask for and Accept Help

Caregivers often find it hard to ask for or accept help, worrying it might burden others or lead to a loss of control. But when help is offered — accept it. Use your calendar to delegate specific tasks. If a family member wants to support but isn't sure how, offer simple ideas like conversation topics or activities to do together. Let go of the need for perfection and remember — you don't have to do everything alone.

Pay Attention to Your Emotions

It's normal to feel sad, frustrated or resentful as a caregiver, but if those feelings become overwhelming, seek help — up to half of caregivers face clinical depression. Try to focus on what you still have, not just what you've lost.

Educate Yourself

Understanding your loved one's condition can give you a greater sense of control and help ease stress —especially with progressive illnesses like dementia. Look into support options such as adult day care or respite care, and try not to assume your loved one will say no. Instead, approach the conversation as a team effort: explain that accepting help can make it easier to continue living at home.

Connect with Others

To ease loneliness, talking regularly with someone supportive — just five minutes a day or week can help. Caregiver support groups, found through hospitals or nonprofits, also offer a safe space to share. Many focus on specific conditions like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's.

For more health and wellness tips, visit **sutteremployer.org**.

EP-25-040