



# A Loved One Is Chronically Ill

## TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

**Y**ou're the caregiver for a sick relative. At the beginning, you were needed and you wanted to help. But now you feel guilty because you're dissatisfied with the situation. What can you do to revive your helping attitude?

### The Nurturer's Role

Being the main caregiver to a sick relative can remind you of parenting. Being needed and giving love and physical care can give you great satisfaction. However, the responsibility can be overwhelming and exhausting. As babies grow older, they require less vigilant care. The future with a sick relative may hold no such promise of reduced demand. The thought that this time may end in the loss of your loved one is also frightening.

Caregiving is very routine. At times, the work is drudgery. You bathe, help with elimination and provide other basic physical needs. Your patient's attitude may also be difficult at times.

### Take Care of Yourself

Don't lose sight of the good you're doing and of the effort you have given already. It's vital that you respect yourself.

Taking time to care for yourself is essential. Eating healthy foods, exercising, taking leisure breaks and finding someone who can show you some care are important for a caregiver. You're giving so much, you need to receive. Let your friends and family do you some favors.

Plan some enjoyable activities for yourself, such as special nights out, so you can look forward to them on a particularly hard day. Mini-breaks with pleasant thoughts are

important, but you have to follow through with the fun, too.

Try to make your caregiving more enjoyable. You might start a hobby which both of you can share. You can read the paper aloud, read a book or talk about events of the past that you shared. Audio book tapes from the library will be stimulating for both of you. Music in the background can be relaxing. Keep a daily journal of your thoughts, and those of your relative.

### When to Seek Help

If you find that you're depressed or angry and no longer look forward to your caregiving responsibilities, it's time to seek help. Caregiving can be lonely if you don't reach out.

Remember that there may be others who have a right to help too. When people (especially other relatives) ask what they can do, tell them. They may withhold their offers of help for fear that you will not welcome them. As much as possible, try to be generous and trusting. Many communities have visiting nurse and hospice services available, and community religious groups may have programs that can make your job easier.

If you become overwhelmed, you may need to ask a social worker to help you assess whether the kind of care you're giving is available elsewhere in the community. There are times when other organizations, such as a hospital and nursing home are the next step. If you're burned out, you can no longer give the best care.

Professional counseling is helpful if you're experiencing guilt, depression or exhaustion. There's help available. Don't allow yourself to become a shut-in.

