



Caring for the Caregiver

Caring for an ailing spouse or elder can be satisfying but difficult work. It involves not only the task of doing, but the task of coping, figuring out creative solutions and working to keep your head above water. The needs of the caregiver often get neglected. But the more neglected the caregiver feels, the less effective he or she may be.



How Can You Help Yourself?

✓ *Recognize your feelings.*

At some point, most caregivers feel helpless, angry, resentful and then guilty for having these negative feelings. Caregivers may feel angry that other members of the family don't help out enough, don't visit or are critical. While it's natural to have these feelings, it's also important not to keep them bottled up inside. Talk about these feelings with others in your family and support network.



✓ *Use support services.*

Start looking into support services before you need help. If you can develop a plan before your situation becomes a crisis, you'll have a clearer head to evaluate your options. Investigate adult day care programs, which often include therapy, activities, meals and health care. Use in-home help services, including nursing care and personal care services. Most communities have meals-on-wheels programs for older and ill individuals. Call social service agencies, home health agencies, home care agencies and transportation systems for referrals.



✓ *Accept help from others.*

Considering the time commitment involved in taking care of an ailing spouse or elder, it's easy to see why many caregivers feel isolated. Not only is it difficult to carve out time to continue pursuing hobbies and activities, but friends and families tend to shy away, either out of fear of being asked to help or simply from a lack of understanding about the disease. If friends or family members want to help, accept their offers. Join a support group where you can share experiences with other caregivers.



✓ *Nourish yourself.*

You don't have to leave your house to do something for yourself. Read a book or watch a favorite movie on your VCR. Let a friend or neighbor come to your house so you can get out for a while, not just to do errands but to go window shopping or to take a walk in the park. Ask yourself what you need in order to take care of yourself. Do you need a support group? In-home help? Respite care? A counselor to help you sort out and understand your situation? Remember, one of the best things you can do for the person you care for is to take good care of yourself.