



## Avoiding Caregiver Burnout

From an evolutionary standpoint, our bodies are made for short bursts of stress like running away from dangerous situations, such as a forest fire. But today's world is one of constant low-level stress. For caregivers, high stress levels are continual. Caregiver burnout or "Compassion Fatigue" is often associated with professionals working in healthcare and social work sectors. The truth is any person who deals regularly with human suffering can experience burnout, this includes people personally providing care to family and friends.

It is important to be self-aware when working or living in caregiving environments. Symptoms of burnout/fatigue can include:

- ☞ Harmful behavior toward the care recipient (*If this happens even once the caregiver should seek help for him or herself immediately*)
- ☞ Unrelenting feelings of sadness or doom
- ☞ Feeling like your life is being stolen from you
- ☞ Crying frequently
- ☞ Being easily angered by, and constantly annoyed at the care recipient
- ☞ Sudden change in eating habits resulting in unwanted weight gain or loss
- ☞ Change in sleeping: inability to fall or stay asleep, or, wanting to stay in bed and sleeping too much
- ☞ Lack of desire to do anything
- ☞ Loss of interest in people and pleasurable activities
- ☞ Feeling worthless and guilty
- ☞ Feeling like nothing you do is good enough
- ☞ Thoughts of death or suicide (*Seek help immediately*)
- ☞ Chronic physical symptoms: headache, back pain, etc.
- ☞ Panic attacks or continual anxiety
- ☞ Feeling completely overwhelmed with worry about how you will manage

As you can see there are a number of signs and symptoms of Caregiver burnout with varying degrees of seriousness. There are some valuable tips on preventing Caregiver burnout in this article, however, it is important to "take stock of your current state of mind to make sure (you) don't need professional treatment..." "...if (you're) in the red zone, a bath ain't gonna cut it" (F. Mathieu, Windsor Star 06/18/2009). If you feel that you are "in the red zone" and might need help with burnout, do not hesitate to seek out your family physician, your employer, your EAP Reps, community agencies or family

and friends, letting them know how you are feeling. Here are some suggestions on how to decompress daily to avoid reaching “toxic” levels of stress from caregiving:

- ☞ Getting enough exercise, sleep and nourishing food is a good idea, and the first steps of self-care
- ☞ Surround yourself with supportive, flexible and enduring relationships that can help maintain your stability
- ☞ Take time to pursue some interest or hobby
- ☞ Take advantage of any offers of help
- ☞ Be patient with yourself, recognizing that some days are going to be more difficult than others, but maybe tomorrow will be better
- ☞ Try to think of at least one good thing that happened today
- ☞ Spirituality can provide support
- ☞ Maintain contact with others in a similar situation through support groups or through formal or informal work “debriefings” with coworkers or management
- ☞ Try to take mini-breaks throughout your day, focus on something outside of the job you are doing