

When you are caring for a loved one, it's easy to forget about your own needs, which puts you at a serious risk of burnout. Being aware and having the knowledge of those warning signs of caregiver burnout can help when you feel that you have reached the end of your rope. Please remember these are just suggestions on what you can do about it.

Caregiver Warning Signs:

1. You feel furious one minute, sad and helpless the next. Whatever you call it, second-hand stress or the more serious caregiver burnout, the despairing mix of physical and emotional exhaustion strikes many caregivers at one time or another. As you ride the emotional rollercoaster of caregiving, you are easily overwhelmed and angry. You can't eat or your appetite has increased too much. You feel exhausted even after a night's sleep. Your brain is foggy and you no longer care about the things that used to bring you joy.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: Your life has changed in profound ways, so it's natural to feel frustrated and to grieve for what you have lost. But untreated anxiety or depression is serious, and you can't take good care of anyone if you don't take of yourself. First, check in with your doctor to rule out any medical conditions that can trigger symptoms of mental health problems. Let your doctor know that you are a caregiver and might need support to be able to continue in this role. Finally, remind yourself that while you are doing everything you can, you will never do everything and that's OK too.

2. You catch every bug that comes your way. Stress does not just make you anxious and depressed. Stress takes a toll on your immune system. If you are getting sick more often and are staying sick longer than you used to, your body is trying to tell you something. Listen up.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: Do not let routine checkups slide because you don't think you have the time. See your primary care doctor and your dentist regularly. That means taking care of you – to keep up on your immunizations, mammograms and other recommended screenings. Make certain that you are eating nutritious meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and getting at least seven hours of sleep a night because that will boost your body's natural defenses.

3. You're snapping at everyone. When you feel helpless and overwhelmed, you are more likely to overreact to the things people do, and/or what they don't do. Like a toddler having a tantrum, you need a timeout.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: Be realistic and true to yourself. Try not to set the bar so high that you can never meet it. Pick up the phone and make a call to a friend. Studies show that simply giving voice to your frustrations and fears dials down tension and eases the isolation that shadows caregivers. Take the time and enjoy it with a friend, go for a walk, and/or exercise.

Mapping out a daily routine that you try to stick to will also give you a greater sense of control. Prioritize your to-do list, whether it's grocery shopping or taking Mom to a doctor's appointment. Don't worry about items that are lower down on your list that don't get done.

4. You know you should exercise, but you just don't have the time. No one functions well when they are in a 'crisis mode' day after day. Caregiving is a marathon, not a sprint. You need to find a way to dial down the tension.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: Force yourself to get moving. Exercise is the best stress reliever. Not only will you feel better right away, the surge of endorphins that exercise triggers lifts your mood, clears your head and helps you sleep better at night. A brisk 30-minute walk or jog on the treadmill, even a 10-minute walk around the block, jump-starts your brain, soothes nerves and powers up your immune system.

5. You can't remember the last time you met a friend for dinner or a movie. Everyone needs a break from time to time, so why don't you give yourself one? Caregivers — motivated by a mix of love, loyalty and a dash of guilt — rarely do.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: We are not suggesting a two-week Caribbean cruise, though that would be lovely, right? An overnight visit with a college friend, a night at a bed and breakfast, even a few hours to write in your journal, sip a cup of hot tea while you read a book or watch reruns of your favorite sitcom, can be restorative. Please remember that we are not suggesting that by taking a break mean running errands or doing chores. It is meant to be YOUR time — time for you!

6. You are the go-to caregiver - Always. This may be the hardest jobs you'll ever have, and it can take time to adjust and come to terms with it. But trying to go at it alone will only guide you to quickly hit bottom.

Suggestion to help soothe the warning sign: Establish a network of relatives, friends or people in the community you can call on. Schedule a family meeting or video chat about who does what and who pays for it. Let everyone know you will not be available to host holiday meals, organize the church book drive or any other draining activities that you've normally handled. Keep a to-do list with you and whip it out when others ask if they can help. Your neighbor might be happy to spend a few hours at your house while you go to the gym. A friend can buy groceries when she's at the store.

Another suggestion is to join a local or an online support group so you can connect with sympathetic ears and glean ideas for coping better. Be aware that there are a wide range of programs and professionals out there who can help make the job easier for you.

To learn more about the resources and services available to help you to care for your loved one, just give us a call. **We are here to help!**



616 West Main Street ♦ Palmyra, PA 17078
717-4838-9000 ♦ PalmstownManor.com
