



## CAREGIVER STRESS

Everyone knows that caring for others is stressful. For most people, caring for children immediately comes to mind. But what happens when the caring involves meeting the needs of other adults?

### Who are caregivers?

Caregivers are the people who care for aging parents, spouses, friends, or adult children with special needs that require ongoing care. It involves meeting not only the physical and daily needs of persons who are ill or disabled, but also finding resources to meet the needs of loved ones.

### What is caregiver stress?

Caregiver stress is the emotional strain of caregiving and results from the unique pressures and demands placed on caregivers. Changes in today's world, especially the proximity of extended family members, means that caregiving needs are being met in changing ways. Caregiver stress is different than childrearing demands in that caregivers' tasks usually increase over time as a loved one's independent functioning diminishes.

### What are the signs of caregiver stress?

- Feeling overwhelmed - general anxiety
- Easily irritated, angered, or saddened
- Sleeping problems – sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired or without energy most of the time
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Change in eating habits – weight gain or loss
- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems
- Role overload – difficulties meeting the other demands in your life
- Financial stressors
- Absenteeism – needing to miss work as you take extra time to for caregiver tasks

If it's any consolation, you're not the only one experiencing caregiver stress. With the population explosion of elder Americans and other adults with special needs, there's also a growing force of Americans facing and meeting the needs of loved ones. Service providers are catching on, and there's been a growth in innovative programs to meet the needs of this unique population.

## **What can you do to relieve caregiver stress?**

- Find out about caregiving resources. In addition to the wide array of medical and social service programs you will access, there are specific programs that can help you find these resources as you educate yourself on what is out there.
- Stay in touch with friends and family. Social activities can help you feel connected and may reduce stress. Also, friends and family know your needs and are in the best position to help you complete tasks.
- Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine
- Find time for exercise most days of the week
- Get in touch with other caregivers. These people are experts not only on finding resources for loved ones, but also the vital task of taking care of the caregiver. Join a support group, especially one designed for caregivers in your particular situation. Many support groups can be found in the community or on the Internet.
- See your doctor for a checkup. Talk to them about symptoms of depression or sickness you may be having.
- Try to get enough sleep and rest
- Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low in saturated fat
- Take one day at a time

As a caregiver, you are sensitive to the needs of others. You couldn't do it if you weren't. Always remember to take care of the caregiver, yourself. You will need to feel satisfied and generally healthy to best meet the needs of the people who depend on you.

## **How can EAP help?**

EAP counselors are trained to provide emotional support and direction for people who experience caregiver stress. We have an eldercare specialist who can help answer your questions and direct you to the community services designed to help you.