

Physical and mental health effects of family caregiving

For many people, the new responsibility of caring for a loved one is a steep learning curve. It involves learning how to care for your loved one's mental, physical and emotional needs while juggling the additional responsibilities it brings to your life. You must also learn to be upbeat and positive with your loved one while dealing with the roller coaster of emotions that comes from seeing them ill or declining through the stages of dementia. It isn't easy and there are many mental and physical effects of family caregiving that you should be aware of.

The ability to remain a caregiver for the long-term depends upon your ability to keep yourself mentally and physically well: that means managing stress. In fact, when considering the mental and physical effects of family caregiving, stress is at the top of the list. It can cause physical illness as well as mental and emotional burnout. A study on the physical and mental effects of caregiving found that:

- Caregiving often results in chronic stress, which includes a caregiver's physical and psychological health
- Depression is one of the common negative effects of caregiving
- Caring for a person with dementia is particularly challenging, causing more severe negative health effects than other types of caregiving

Learning to manage stress from the outset is perhaps the most important thing you can do to as a caregiver.

You need to pay attention to your own health as well. Caregivers tend to ignore their own health, forgetting to schedule regular check-ups with physicians and not eating regular meals. It is important to remember that if you are not healthy you cannot carry out your caregiving duties.

Arrange for a replacement caregiver, either friends, family or a professional caregiver while you go to doctor's appointments to keep yourself well and strong.

As a caregiver, be particularly aware of changes in your physical well-being. Sleeplessness, loss of appetite, resentment toward your loved one and exhaustion are all signs of caregiver burnout. It is possible to stop caregiver burnout in its tracks, but only if you address the symptoms immediately and take steps to care for yourself. That will mean scheduling replacement caregivers to give yourself a break for an hour or an afternoon, but it is crucial to do that in order to regain your energy after caregiver burnout.

There are positive aspects to being a caregiver. You can feel enormous fulfillment and self-satisfaction knowing that you are caring for the health and well-being of a loved one when he or she needs it most. You may also feel increased self-esteem knowing that you are bringing joy and happiness to your loved one at a time when they may feel vulnerable and alone.

As a caregiver, you may also receive benefits from your loved one. The essence of caregiving provides a unique closeness that isn't readily available to non-caregivers. You have a front row seat to your loved one's thoughts and emotions. As his or her daily guardian, either literally or figuratively speaking, you may have intimate

conversations that other friends and family members may never have. Spending days together allows for the sharing of memories and reflections. These are special moments that are open to you as a caregiver and that you will carry with you always.

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)

Source: US National Library of Medicine

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