Managing Caregiver Stress

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The Self-Care Conundrum

Have you tried SELF CARE?
(it's not that simple)

“You’ve been awfully tense lately. They say petting a cat is a great way to relieve stress!”
What is stress?

And how does stress affect the body?
Stress: A reaction to demands

“The non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.”

-Hans Selye, 1936

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but how we perceive and react to it is up to us!
Types of Stress: Mild Acute

Mild acute stress reaction

- Activation
  - Mild stressor
  - Sympathetic stress reaction
  - Parasympathetic rebound
  - Return to normal

Types of Stress: Good/Bad

- Eustress vs. Distress

Types of Stress: Chronic

Chronic stress response

Moderate stressor
Strong sympathetic stress response
Inadequate proprioception of completion, failure to completely discharge sympathetic arousal

Sympathetic
Parasympathetic

Activation

Time

Diminished vagal tone
Failure to recover to normal

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Types of Stress: Chronic

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Stress: Physical Symptoms

- Chronic stress seems to cause or worsen:
  - Headaches
  - Back, neck, shoulder pain
  - Weight gain
  - Sleep dysfunction
  - Bruxism (teeth grinding)
  - Tinnitus (ear ringing)
  - Common cold
  - Stomach problems
  - Heart disease
  - Alzheimer’s disease
  - Mental illness

Stress: Emotional Symptoms

- Irritable/angry: 37%
- Nervous/anxious: 35%
- Lack of interest/motivation: 34%
- Fatigued: 32%
- Overwhelmed: 32%
- Depressed/sad: 32%

Burnout

**Do you have Caregiver Burnout?**

1. You no longer find pleasure in things you once found enjoyable.
2. Friends and family have expressed concerns about your well-being.
3. You’re getting negative feedback at work.
4. You’re having problems with your spouse.
5. You experience intense and recurrent feelings of anger, sadness, worry or fear.
6. You have difficulty concentrating.
7. You have trouble sleeping, drastic weight changes or other unexplained health problems.
8. You use a substance to cope with, manage or suppress painful feelings.
What is Self-Care?

What gets in the way?

How can it work for me?
What is Self-Care?

**Self-Care:**

*Taking Care of Yourself*

“Any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health.”

Self-Care Barriers

1. Too burned out to do anything
2. Other people come first
3. Not enough time

1. Too Burned Out

- You deserve credit for
  - Knowing your limits
  - Knowing you are already beyond them

- It’s OK to need help!
1. Too Burned Out

• Get the help you need:
  • Take care of **physical health problems**
  • **Share your struggle** with someone
  • Attend to **mental health needs**
  • **Recognize** what caused your burnout
  • **Choose** to do things differently now
2. Other people come first

PARENTS REPORT HIGHER AVERAGE STRESS LEVELS THAN NON-PARENTS

YOU GOTTA NOURISH TO FLOURISH

YOU CAN’T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST.

Put Your Mask on First!
The Caregiver’s Guide to Self-Care

3. Not enough time

1. **Notice** where you are currently spending time
2. Does this match your **values**?
3. **Realize** how long things take
4. **Accept** limited energy
5. Remember, it’s about **priorities**
3. Not enough time

You can’t do everything!

Source: https://bit.ly/2BEQZ8h
The Basics

- Seek ways to improve sleep
- Take small steps to improve nutrition
- Add exercise to your day
- Connect with others
- Care for your mental health
Exercise

• Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (UK):
  • “If physical activity was a drug, it would be classified as a wonder drug.”
  • “Twice as many deaths are due to inactivity than due to obesity on its own”
  • At least 30 min of “moderately intense” exercise 5 days per week

Source: https://bit.ly/2AKHJkB
Connecting with Others

- “Numerous studies indicate social support is essential for maintaining physical and psychological health”
- “Social support seems to moderate genetic and environmental vulnerabilities for mental illness”

-- Fatih Ozbay, MD, et. al

Source: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/
COMMON:
• Overestimating what you can do → inevitable failure
• Comparing self to others + Noticing negative → low self-esteem
• Trying to meet expectations of others → weak, resentful, regretful
• Caring only for others + trying to do it all → burnout

MORE HELPFUL:
• Accurately estimate abilities & needs → success, reinforcement
• Comparing self now to past self → recognizing growth and change
• Trying to meet your own expectations → powerful, motivated
• Caring for self + setting limits + asking for help → lower stress
Balance is something you can achieve
Allow others to share the load
Let go of unrealistic expectations
Act upon your goals and priorities
No is a word you can learn to say
Communicate to strengthen relationships
Expect and plan for the unexpected
Self-Care is a Thing You Can Do!

- Mindfulness
- Guided Meditation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Paced Breathing (2-3-4 or 4-7-8)

Source: 4 years working as an outpatient mental health therapist

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UNC HEALTH™
Get creative!

• My self-care?
Get creative!

• What’s YOURS?