

The Caregiver Stress Syndrome: Caring for the Caregiver

Statistically about 25% of all adults provide at least some care-giving services for an aging relative with medical issues, with about 45% of these providing care for their spouse. This is often a very rewarding experience for all involved and evolves out of the normal love and care that is part of the relationship. At the same time care giving is also a very psychologically, socio-economically and physically stressful job. Some of the other statistics associated with family care giving is as follows:

- 1) Most caregivers who care for those with neurologic diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, stroke or Parkinson's Disease provide 80 or more hours of care a week.
- 2) Family caregivers are at greater than a 50% increased risk of depression than those who do not provide care for another.
- 3) Family caregivers are statistically at a 2/3 greater risk of developing many chronic illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke than other age- matched adults who do not provide care to another adult.
- 4) Caregivers appear to lose up to an average of \$25,000 in wages or other possible revenues/year as compared to non-caregiver age-matched individuals.

So what can an individual do to decrease some of the stress associated with being a family caregiver?

First of all, recognizing the signs of caregiver stress is a very important step in knowing when it is time to get help. Some of these signs may be: denial, anger, social withdrawal, anxiety, depression, exhaustion, sleeplessness, irritability, lack of concentration and new health problems. If you recognize these symptoms in yourself or in someone else who is a family caregiver there are many ways to get help. The Aging and Disability Resource Center has many resources to help adults caring for older relatives and those with other disabilities including a course known as "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" which can teach individuals effective ways to care for themselves while providing optimal care for their loved one.

Other tips for caring for oneself are as follows:

- 1) Take care of yourself -- assure yourself plenty of rest, exercise, and well-balanced meals.
- 2) Learn to accept changes as they occur.
- 3) Do legal and financial planning early to take away the "worry."
- 4) Be realistic in your expectations.
- 5) Give yourself credit, not guilt.