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Supporting a person with dementia requires time and energy. While it can be a rewarding experience, it can also be demanding and stressful. Knowing and recognizing signs of stress in yourself or someone you care about is the first step towards taking action.

If the following symptoms occur, call your doctor or contact your local Alzheimer Society for help.

10 signs of caregiver stress

Sign 1 Denial
...about the disease and its effect on the person with the disease.
“Everyone is overreacting. I know my parent will get better.”

Sign 2 Anger
...at the person with dementia, yourself and others.
“If they ask me that question once more I will scream!”

Sign 3 Withdrawing socially
...you no longer want to stay in touch with friends or participate in activities you once enjoyed.
“I don’t care about getting together with friends anymore.”

Sign 4 Anxiety
...about facing another day and what the future holds.
“I’m worried about what will happen when I can no longer provide care.”

Sign 5 Depression
...you feel sad and hopeless a lot of the time.
“I don’t care anymore. What is wrong with me?”

Sign 6 Exhaustion
...you barely have the energy to complete your daily tasks.
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Sign 7 Sleeplessness
...you wake up in the middle of the night or have nightmares and stressful dreams.
“I rarely sleep through the night, and don’t feel refreshed in the morning.”

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...you cry at minor upsets; you are often irritable.
“I cried when there was no milk for my coffee this morning. Then I yelled at my child.”

Sign 9 Lack of concentration
...you have trouble focusing and you find it difficult completing complex tasks.
“I used to do the daily crossword. Now I am lucky if I can solve half of it.”

Sign 10 Health problems
...you may lose or gain weight, get sick more often (colds, flu), or develop chronic health problems (backaches, high blood pressure).
“Since the spring, I have had either a cold or the flu. I just can’t seem to shake them.”

10 ways to reduce caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you need to take care of yourself. You may well be the most important person in the life of the person with dementia. The suggestions below will help maintain your health and well-being.

Learn about dementia
Knowing as much as you can about dementia and care strategies will prepare you for the dementia journey. Understanding how dementia affects the person will also help you comprehend and adapt to the changes.

Be realistic about yourself
You need to be realistic about how much you can do. What do you value most? A walk with the person you are caring for, time by yourself, or a tidy house? There is no “right” answer; only you know what matters most to you and how much you can do.

Be realistic about dementia
It is important, though difficult, to be realistic about dementia and how it will affect the person over time. Once you are realistic, it will be easier for you to adjust your expectations.

Accept your feelings
When caring for a person with dementia, you will have many mixed feelings. In a single day, you may feel content, angry, guilty, happy, sad, embarrassed, afraid and helpless. These feelings may be confusing. But they are normal. Recognize that you are doing the best you can.

Share information and feelings with others
Sharing information about dementia with family and friends will help them understand what is happening and prepare them to provide the help and support you need. It is also important to share your feelings. Find someone you feel comfortable talking with about your feelings. This may be a close friend or family member, someone you met at a support group, a member of your faith community, or a healthcare professional.
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