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## Managing the Stress of Caregiving

The life of a caregiver is multifaceted – there is love, caring, warmth, and joy. There is hurt, frustration, anger, and guilt. These contradictory emotions can be experienced in the same day and even in the same moment. Balancing these all within one's heart can erode energy, confidence, sense of self, and even health. While it's vital for caregivers to have respite time for themselves, that's not always easy or possible for everyone. For those caregivers who find themselves alone in the responsibility and stress of caregiving, following is some information and tips to hopefully help to regain inner strength, self-acceptance, peace, and more good days.

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, the way people perceive and respond to an event foretells the way they cope and adjust to it. So stress can be increased by one's very perception of the situation – seeing the glass as half-full or half-empty. The level of stress can be impacted by these factors:

- Whether the caregiving is voluntary. People feeling no choice in the responsibilities are more likely to feel distress, strain, and resentment.
- One's relationship with the care recipient. Perfect days may not always happen, despite (or because of) all the shared time together. Not everything is within our control.
- Personal coping abilities. Past experience with handling stress can predict what occurs in the present. Try to identify and build on current coping strengths.
- The caregiving situation. Some situations can be more stressful than others, such as caring for someone living with dementia or a physical limitation.
- The availability of additional support.

Identifying one's personal stress is an important first step, and then accepting it as normal and understandable. Caregivers in all situations should know they are not alone. The [Area Agency on Aging](#) (937-223-HELP or 1-800-258-7277) is a good resource for

information on where to find respite care that can help caregivers gain some time to themselves. Consider getting homemaking services to help with cleaning and laundry, meal services to lighten the burden of cooking, transportation services if the care recipient has difficulty with the family car, help with mowing and raking.

Following are some tips from the Family Caregiver Alliance that may help to manage caregiver stress:

- Recognize warning signs early, including irritability, sleep problems, and forgetfulness. Know personal warning signs and act to make changes - don't wait until feeling overwhelmed.
- Identify sources of stress. Ask, "What is causing stress for me?" These might be having too much to do, family disagreements, feelings of inadequacy, or not feeling able to say 'No.'
- Identify what can and cannot be changed. Remember that no one can change another person, but everyone can change oneself. Attempting to change people or factors we have no control over leads to frustration and anger. Instead, ask "What do I have some control over? What can I change?" Even a small change in perception or routine can make a big difference.
- Take action to regain a sense of control. Stress reducers can be activities like walking and other exercise, gardening, meditation, or having coffee with a neighbor or friend. Identify stress reducers that work specifically for you.

Caregiving can be the most difficult, the most memorable, the most important part of one's life. Find more support, tips and helpful information from the [Family Caregiver Alliance website](#).