

## 5 Tips to Cope with Caregiver Anger

How do you react when your senior parent or spouse asks you what day it is for the thousandth time that morning? Do you sometimes feel like screaming?

Or what about when your formerly sweet wife suddenly hits you in the face with her fist as you are trying to dry her off after a shower? If it's the first time she's done this, you might shrug it off. But what about the tenth time...or the twentieth? Do you feel like shouting "stop that!" at her?

In a best-case scenario, caring for a senior loved one would bring the two of you together in an intimate bond, providing memories you could cherish long after they're gone. But all too frequently, the rigors of caregiving combined with the erratic behaviors exhibited by seniors with dementia or other health issues can lead caregivers to feel rage and other so-called "negative" emotions.

One member, of the [Remember for Alzheimer's](#) Facebook community, put it this way:

"I hope and wish that my wife's dementia had brought us closer together. It hasn't. In fact, she blames me for her present limitations, weeps, complains, hits me and does little (in my opinion) to help herself. While I realize this behavior is all disease-inspired, it has become increasingly hard for me not to feel anger, disgust and resentment. I have become a full-time caregiver to a person who looks like my wife but has become an angry, disgruntled stranger."

Dementia is not the only condition that can cause changes in a senior's behavior. Medical conditions like stroke—or even the side effects of a medication—can alter a senior family member's personality and ability to reason. Stubbornness and irrationality on the part of a senior can create a perfect storm of impatience and anger in a family caregiver. When you spend all your energy getting your loved one to shower and use the bathroom, only to find feces smeared on the walls later that evening, you might feel like blowing your stack in fury. "Just when I thought my day was finally over, now I get to spend another hour cleaning up this disgusting mess!"

When family caregivers open up about their emotions, they are quick to talk about their feelings of stress, sadness and depression. But they don't often talk about the anger, impatience and even rage that can flare in an instant. Who hasn't snapped once or twice during their caregiving journey and then relentlessly beat themselves up for it later?

If you have ever felt like clenching your fists and screaming in frustration, you are not alone. Most caregivers probably experience these strong emotions from time to time. The key lies in coping with them.

### **Tip One: Forgive Yourself**

Don't expect yourself, to maintain a constant "patient attitude, at all times. This is unrealistic. Human beings are not perfect. We get weary physically and emotionally. If you experience an episode of impatience or anger, forgive yourself. Try to give yourself credit for the thousands of times you have exhibited great patience—and for the hours and hours of loving care you provide to your senior family member.

### **Tip Two: Think Like a Toddler**

If you are caring for a three-year-old, you probably do not shout angrily at them because they cannot comprehend the concept of waiting another two hours for dinner. Instead, you likely re-direct their attention and give them a snack.

Toddlers display very little self-regulation, and they can't follow any sort of complex logic. Seniors with cognitive issues can exhibit this type of behavior, too.

Your parent, spouse or other senior family member obviously is not a child—and you should always strive to treat them with the dignity and respect you reserve for adults. But their cognitive function may correlate more closely to that of a toddler than an adult.

If your senior loved one is driving you crazy in the moment, ask yourself how you would treat a toddler in the same situation. You may find you have more patience at the thought of dealing with a small child who is having a tantrum than you can muster for coping with an adult displaying the same behavior.

### **Tip Three: Get Something to Eat**

Speaking of tantrums, anyone who has raised children knows the highest probability for a meltdown occurs in the late afternoon, when a child is hungry. This is partly due to a natural drop in blood sugar levels that occurs when a person hasn't eaten for a few hours. Low blood glucose levels can impair your coping ability.

You can help yourself and your senior family member avoid a potential afternoon meltdown by eating a healthy snack together. Ideally, aim to eat something every three hours to maintain your blood sugar levels. You might find your ability to cope with the stress of caregiving improves considerably.

#### **Tip Four: Go Ahead—Punch a Pillow**

Sometimes, physically ventilating your rage can be very therapeutic. If you're "having a moment," feel free to excuse yourself and go scream into a pillow. Or punch the pillow, if it makes you feel better.

As a longer-term strategy, consider increasing the amount of exercise you get. Physical activity is a well-known mood booster, so any time you can get some exercise it should help reduce your overall stress level-and possibly your anger, too.

#### **Tip Five: Take Time Off**

Easier said than done, right?

Remember: you can't draw from an empty well. Often, impatience and anger stem from exhaustion. Caregiving can sap your strength mentally, and it can have negative effects on your physical health if it disrupts your sleep or eating habits.

If you cannot tap other family members to take over the caregiving duties for a day or more, consider hiring a professional caregiver . For a small fee, you can recoup some peace of mind, regain your perspective and fill up your well of patience. Taking time away from caregiving benefits both you and your senior loved one.

Lastly, don't feel guilty if you experience anger, impatience, disgust or any of the other "negative" emotions during your caregiving journey. Sometimes, just acknowledging these feelings can dissipate them. Enlist a trusted confidante who is willing to hear your frustration and anger without judging you or trying to fix the problem. You might find this strategy alone allows you to cope much better with the unpleasant emotions that can accompany caregiving.