

## REDUCING CAREGIVER STRESS

Everyone deals with stress differently. The important thing is to know when you should take steps to reduce it before it negatively affects your quality of life and your effectiveness as a caregiver.

1. **Learn as much as you can:** Illnesses are complex, which poses new and greater challenges over time. Be prepared for the current situation and the future possibilities.
2. **Set personal limits:** Be honest with yourself and only do what you can handle. If certain duties are stressful for you, seek outside assistance. It isn't a sign of weakness to ask for help. Although it may be a challenge to find the right help, it's worth the time investment.
3. **Re-evaluate your role from time to time:** If your loved one's illness progresses, you will be forced to adjust your expectations and responsibilities. Be sure to look at your changing role on a regular basis, and even to look ahead to future changes so that you can prepare in advance.
4. **Get help:** No matter what stage of disease your loved one is in, there will be times when you need emotional support and physical assistance. Don't fall into the trap of doing it all yourself.
5. **Take care of yourself:** You are the most important person to your loved one, so taking care of yourself is essential to both of you.
6. **Identify what you can and cannot change:** There is a fine line between doing what you can and taking on too much. Realize that there are some things you simply cannot change. Don't try to get your loved one to change attitude or behavior when it simply may be too much for them.
7. **Keep your sense of humor:** Illness and disease are serious but that doesn't mean you can't find some lightness in everyday events. Laughing at yourself or with your loved one can be comforting.
8. **Share your situation:** There is nothing as therapeutic as talking about your feelings towards your care giving role. You may find people offering valuable solutions to your challenges.
9. **Stay positive:** Maintaining a positive attitude can actually affect the way you cope with the realities of care giving. If you are having trouble staying positive, consider joining a support group, seeing a therapist or just talking to a trusted friend to regain perspective.
10. **Plan ahead:** Illness does not follow an identical course but it can progress in a recognizable pattern. Planning for the next stages of the disease, can be helpful.

