

Caregiver Burnout

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According to [Statistics Canada](#), 1 in 4 Canadians have been a caregiver at some point in their lives. A caregiver is someone who provides support to a person in need, without financial compensation. Many Canadians look after a family or friend when their health is failing. Being a caregiver can be one of the most rewarding experiences but also both mentally and physically challenging. As a caregiver it can happen that you forget about your own health very quickly. Losing yourself in caring for someone else can lead to caregiver burnout.

What is Caregiver Burnout?

Caregiver burnout is the feeling of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual exhaustion. On the whole caregiving is generally deemed as a positive experience for caregivers, but it is important to be aware of the many stressors that go along with the experience. Worrying about your loved ones' needs, both physical and emotional, concerns about their declining health and the grief associated with end-of-life care can be challenging. The actual caring for your loved one coupled with your own personal sacrifices, like working less or spending less time with other people and on hobbies, can all accumulate to cause caregiver burnout.

According to a study from the [Journal of Gerontology](#) (Perkins M, Howard VJ, Wadley VG, et al. 68(4), 2013) caregivers who were emotionally and physically stressed were at a greater risk of increased health challenges than caregivers who were not suffering from burnout.

Signs & Symptoms

Caregiver burnout doesn't just happen overnight. It grows from the little stressors adding up, not being addressed and not taking the time for yourself as the caregiver. Being aware of the signs and symptoms will help you understand caregiver burnout and take steps to get help for the stressors that may be causing it.

Signs and symptoms of caregiver burnout to be aware of:

- Exhaustion
- Disturbed sleep/insomnia
- Change in eating habits and/or poor eating habits, either overeating or under eating
- Feeling anxious and lonely
- Neglecting your own health and missing your own health appointments
- Irritability and not feeling like 'yourself'
- Isolating yourself
- Feeling depressed and unmotivated
- Losing interest in your own life and activities you enjoy
- Feeling physically ill
 - Increase in infections
 - Headaches
 - Body aches and pains
 - Nausea

How to Avoid Caregiver Burnout

When a new baby enters the world, in many cultures a common saying is that it ‘takes a village to raise a child.’ This saying can also be used when we are looking after those at the end of life, it truly takes a ‘village’ or community to look after someone when their health is declining.

If you are the main caregiver for a family member or friend, start to build up your ‘village’. Some ideas on where and how to find your support network are:

- Family members that are available from time to time
- Friends that could lend a helping hand
- Reaching out to people for help with things like groceries, cooking, laundry and everyday tasks can take some of the caregiver load off
- Utilizing services within your community, such as a Meals on Wheels program, grocery delivery, pharmacy delivery, online ordering and curb side pick up services, etc.
- [Nav-CARE](#) program that can assist with finding appropriate resources for your specific needs
- Greater Trail [Hospice](#) program

This [questionnaire](#) by the American Medical Association is a great caregiver self assessment tool, for a check in to see if you are at risk for caregiver burnout.

It is important that you also take care of yourself and make time to refresh your mind and body. Self-care is very important for caregivers to help avoid burnout.

How Greater Trail Hospice Can Help

Hospice can help alleviate some of the challenges that caregivers face, and in turn help reduce the chances of caregiver burnout.

Hospice volunteers can offer support in the form of:

- [Respite](#) care for families by volunteers
- [Nav-CARE](#) program volunteers to assist in finding specific resources that are needed
- [Grief Support Volunteers](#) to provide grief information and support in either 1-on-1 or group settings; this can help with grief after a loss or anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is the feeling of mourning, but can happen before the physical death of the loved one. Many caregivers struggle with these feelings and discussing them can help.

Resources

If you are caring for a friend or family member this may be a whole new experience for you - looking after and caring for somebody with various medical, physical, and emotional needs. There are many online resources that can offer suggestions and advice on caring for specific ailments in your loved one and for yourself.

Below are a few helpful online resources:

- [Alzheimer Society of BC](#) information about Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

- [Canadian Cancer Society](#) provides insight into those caring for somebody with cancer.
- [Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence](#) resources and knowledge sharing for caregivers.
- [Caregiver burnout Questionnaire](#) caregiver self-assessment for burnout.
- [Compassionate Care Benefit](#) is a form of Employment Insurance (EI) that covers wages for those caring for a family member who is gravely ill.
- [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) information, support and resources associated with caregiving.
- [Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada](#) has resources for those caring for people with heart disease and stroke.
- [Virtual Hospice: Caregiving](#) learning modules, video demonstrations for different medical needs and resources for caregivers.

Sources:

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