

Could You Be A Stressed-Out Caregiver?

You might, if you exhibit the following signs:

1. **Lots of tears.** If you seem to be on the verge of tears, or crying regularly, you may be over-stressed.
2. **An over-emotional reaction to every day situations.** Do you overreact to common problems, such as the dog barking or the mail arriving late? A person exposed to a lot of stress sometimes loses the ability to distinguish between small nuisances and large problems.
3. **Nervous habits.** Someone who chain-smokes, overeats or bites her nails is probably exhibiting behavior of an over-stressed person.
4. **Scattered thinking.** Are you unable to think clearly or express your thoughts and ideas effectively? If so, you're probably on overload--you're over-stressed.

Who's at risk when a caregiver is overloaded?

1. **The family caregiver.** Persons under a lot of stress are susceptible to illnesses, such as colds and flu. Studies show that prolonged stress may increase the chance of developing a serious illness, such as cancer and heart disease.
2. **The care recipient.** A stressed-out caregiver may lack the patience and clear thinking to handle the overwhelming needs of a person suffering from a chronic illness.

What can alleviate stress?

1. Regular breaks are very important. Caregivers need to distance themselves from their care giving burdens daily--even if only for an hour. Distance can help caregivers keep their perspective--and patience.
2. An outlet to vent their feelings. Sometimes stress results when caregivers cannot vent their feelings of guilt, anger and frustration.

Some great stress-relievers:

- ? Join a support group and attend as often as you can.
- ? Take a walk around your neighborhood.
- ? Meet a friend for coffee.
- ? Read a "so-good-I-can't-put-it-down" book.

- ? Rent a good movie.
- ? Make time for a regular massage.
- ? Join a health club for some regular exercise.
- ? Meditate for five minutes every day.
- ? Put on soothing music to enjoy.
- ? Take your best friend out for dinner.
- ? Plan a vacation to take whenever you have time.

What Do You Do If You Know A Stress-Out Caregiver

- ? **Be a good listener.** Ask how they are feeling, how they are holding up. Often, we focus on the patients' feelings, and overlook the family caregivers'.
- ? **Support their outside interests.** Family caregivers may feel guilty about time spent away from the care recipient. Caregivers often need reassurance that their participation in an outside activity is okay.
- ? **Finally, if you notice a caregiver that seems particularly stressed, ask if she is feeling well.** Share your concerns with her. If she agrees with your concerns, ask if you can contact your Area Agency on Aging on her behalf. The Area Agency on Aging will have suggestions on agencies and resources that can help.

Half of the American population is overweight and one-fourth is obese. The problem is more a matter of how much rather than what we eat. The average person eats 150 calories more a day than the average person 20 years ago. That adds up to 16.5 pounds per year.

Overeating has now been identified as a risk for heart disease by the American Heart Association indicating that an exceptionally heavy meal increases by 10 times a person's existing risk of heart attack in the first hour after eating. By the third hour, the increased risk has disappeared.

Depression Facts

About: Clinical depression is a medical condition that affects more than 19 million Americans. It can touch anyone, regardless of gender, race, age or income, although nearly twice as many women as men are affected each year.

Depression can cause a loss of pleasure in daily activities and a loss of life functioning. However, not everyone experiences the same symptoms. In some people, depression is characterized by repeated episodes over a lifetime. In others, it is chronic. In both cases, effective treatment is available.

Major depression often begins between the ages of 15-30, sometimes earlier. Research shows that depression runs in families.

You need to see your doctor if you experience five or more of the following **symptoms of depression** for longer than 2 weeks, or if symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily routine:

- ? Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- ? Sleeping too little or too much
- ? Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain
- ? Loss of interest in activities that you typically enjoy
- ? Restlessness or irritability
- ? Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (examples are headaches, chronic pain, constipation, or other digestive disorders)
- ? Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- ? Fatigue or loss of energy
- ? Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless

? Thoughts of death or suicide

One type of depression known as 'bipolar disorder' consists of bouts of depression alternating with episodes of mania. The following are **symptoms of manic behavior:**

- ? Abnormally elevated mood irritability
- ? Severe insomnia
- ? Grandiose notions
- ? Increased talking
- ? Racing thoughts
- ? Increased activity, including sexual activity
- ? Markedly increased energy
- ? Poor judgment that leads to risk-taking behaviors
- ? Inappropriate social behavior

Risks: Depression can interfere with everyday living. If left untreated, it can affect personal relationships, work and even lead to physical problems. In severe cases, it can lead to suicide.

Treatment: It's important to note that you cannot treat depression on your own. There are various treatments available, depending on the type and severity of your depression. Medications and psychological treatment are often used in combination. Many people also find psychotherapy helpful in dealing with interpersonal problems often associated with their illness.

Eighty percent of people with serious depression can improve and return to daily activities, usually in a matter of weeks. It is important not to ignore symptoms of depression.

It's never too late to lower your risk by protecting your skin. And you don't have to stay inside all the time. You can still be safe and enjoy the outdoors.

Follow these tips when you're in the sun:

- ? Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.
- ? Wear protective clothing like broad-brimmed hats and long-sleeve shirts.

But also try to limit the time you spend in the sun, especially between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. These are peak burning hours.

Here are some other tips for protecting your skin:

- ? Find shade! Bring an umbrella to the beach. Sit under a shady tree.
- ? Use skin care products with sunscreen. Look for body lotion, face moisturizer and lip balm with SPF 15 or higher.
- ? Get in the habit of using sunscreen every day, no matter what the season. Put it on every morning and again during the day.
- ? Don't use sun lamps or tanning booths.

WARNING

Kids need extra protection from the sun because their skin is more likely to burn. Use these tips to protect the kids in your life. Be an example for them to follow.