



CAREGIVERS

HOW FAMILY MEMBERS ARE AFFECTED BY THEIR LOVED ONE'S CONDITION

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Some doctors believe caregivers are hidden patients, because they may be more prone to illness from stress and neglect of their own needs. Caregivers may feel that all their energy is focused on their loved one, even if they are not providing care with dressing, feeding or bathing. They may worry constantly about falls, acute attacks of vertigo or dizziness, and feel that their life has become constricted due to the limitations on where they can go with your loved one, and how long they can stay. They might not have a safe place to share these normal feelings of frustration, which can develop into resentment. While their loved one has to deal with health problems, they find themselves worried about whether their family member is following dietary guidelines, taking medication correctly, and sleeping well. Their own schedule is often disrupted because of the concern over their loved one's health. There are some signs of stress overload that often happen in family members of those who are ill. These may include:

- Excessive anger toward the person they care for, their family, or themselves
- Anxiety and depression
- Extreme tiredness
- Health problems (such as heartburn, headaches, or catching a series of colds or flu)
- Irritability
- Sleep problems (sleeping too much or not enough)
- Social withdrawal
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns are also symptoms that something is wrong.

If you notice these, you might want to:

- Talk to your family doctor
- Talk to your loved one and your family
- Take care of your health
- Educate yourself about your loved one's medical condition.
- Stay organized
- Look for help in your community
- Join a support group - I am glad you are here with us!

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- Seek counseling

Sometimes we are just heartbroken that life has changed for us. But it's important for us as the family support members to take care of ourselves. We need good health for our own interests and goals, and also so that we can be there for our loved ones.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Article on Caregiver Stress](#)
- [VEDA's Family Support Network website](#)

QUESTIONS FOR THE GROUP

Based on time limits, use the ones most fitting for your group, but try to end on the last one, which is positive and encouraging:

Q: Do you find the term 'caregiver' to be positive or negative? Or do you feel it is not appropriate at this stage of life? Many articles on the internet focus on caregivers for people who are very dependent, such as those with dementia. What is the difference for some of us whose spouses are still active, but somewhat limited due to their physical health?

Q: Has anyone had to make major lifestyle adjustments as a result of their loved one's illness? How about changes in the home? Were financial adjustments necessary?

Q: How would you say your thoughts about the future have been altered by your loved one's illness? How have your own future plans been changed?

Q: Where is your safe place to share your own feelings about the health problems you are dealing with as a family? Do you feel you have enough support to handle all you do?

Q: Where have you found the most help for living with this disorder? Are there any tips you would like to share with the group?

Q: What are some of the things you do to take care of yourself? Perhaps we can encourage one another to stay involved socially and with our own interests.

(Example response by the facilitator: I'd like to start by saying that my spouse is not terribly ill, but his health problems do limit our travel and outings. Sometimes I get frustrated. I do go to an annual women's retreat with my church that lasts 3 days, and once a year I go and stay with my daughter who lives several hundred miles from us...I stay for a week, and we go out and do some of things my spouse can no longer do. We both like to hike and we might even go dancing or ride bikes in the state park. It helps keep me energized and recharged to get out and do these things occasionally).

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