



## Caregiver Quiz

Score each item on a scale of 1 through 7 :

- 1 (Never)
- 2 (Once or twice)
- 3 (Rarely)
- 4 (Sometimes)
- 5 (Often)
- 6 (Usually)
- 7 (Always)

**Score**     **In caring for a loved one, how often do you have the following experiences:**

- Feeling resentful
- Feeling trapped
- Being tired, not getting enough sleep
- Feeling weary
- Feeling troubled
- Feeling helpless
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Being physically exhausted
- Feeling disillusioned
- Feeling useless
- Being utterly drained of feeling
- Feeling "burned out"
- Being unhappy
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling rejected
- TOTAL

If your score is under 60, you're in good shape. If your total score is 60 or above, the stress of taking care of your parent is beginning to take its toll. If it's 90 or above, you are living with caregiver burnout. You are not alone! A study conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP found that more than half of those who provide major care for parents (and one in four who provide any care) experience stress and strain. Prolonged stress can have serious physical and emotional consequences.

But there are things you can do to manage that stress:

- **Take care of your health.** What to do: Eat nutritious meals; don't give in to stress-driven urges for sweets or overindulgence in alcohol. Get enough sleep; if you are awakened at night try napping during the day to make up your sleep. Get regular medical checkups. Exercise regularly, even if it means finding someone else to provide care while you walk or go to exercise class. If you have any

symptoms of depression (extreme sadness, trouble concentrating, apathy, hopelessness, thoughts about death), see a doctor right away. Depression is an illness that must be treated.

- **Maintain social contacts.** This may take advance planning, but it's worth it. Isolation increases stress, while having fun, laughing and focusing on something besides your problems can help you keep your emotional balance.
- **Call on friends and relatives for help.**
- **Get additional help from community services and organizations.**
- **Use community services to get a break.** Don't feel guilty about needing time off, and remember that your parent may also benefit from having someone else around. Options to consider: Respite care (for some time off) by friends, relatives or volunteers at home or at an adult day center. Or perhaps try for a weekend or longer vacation (using home health agencies, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and board and care homes, which will sometimes accept a short-term resident when they have space). Adult day centers, which usually operate five days a week during business hours, provide care in a group setting to older people who need supervision (including health monitoring, transportation, nursing care and therapeutic recreation).
- **Seek support.** Some research suggests that keeping your feelings bottled up can harm your immune system and lead to physical illness. Options to consider: Talk with friends and family about the rewards and challenges of caregiving. Share experiences with coworkers in similar situations. Pray (the most common coping mechanism for caregivers, according to the survey cited above). See a professional counselor. Join a caregiver support group to share emotions and experiences, seek and give advice, and exchange practical information with your peers. Visit the AARP Webplace Caregiver Circle Bulletin Board.
- **Try to find time for yourself to unwind when stresses pile up.** Do something you enjoy, like reading, walking or listening to music. Some people find it helps to meditate or use relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or visualizing being somewhere that makes you feel happy or calm.
- **Organize.** Having a plan will give you more time for yourself. Steps to take: Set priorities and realistic goals. Make a list of what needs to be done (caregiving and other responsibilities), and get the most important things done first. Arrange your day to take full advantage of outside help. Pace yourself; don't overwork yourself some days to the point of exhaustion. Set limits and learn to say "no."
- **Deal constructively with negative feelings.** Steps to take: When feeling resentful, think about how to change things. Recognize the anger-guilt-anger cycle, and stop it immediately by forgiving yourself for being angry. Then distance yourself from the situation, figure out what caused the anger, and decide how you can respond more constructively the next time. Focus on the good points. Hold a family meeting to resolve conflicts with siblings and other relatives. Feel good about your accomplishments as a caregiver instead of emphasizing your shortcomings.