

## **Tips for Managing Caregiver Stress**

When caring for someone it is important to manage your own physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Here are 10 ways to be a healthy caregiver.

### **1. Enhance your knowledge and practical skills**

- Understand what's going on as soon as possible. The more you know, the better you'll be able to cope. If you're unsure about your loved one's diagnosis, visit their physician so that you can get the diagnosis and understand what is going to come in the future.
- Caregivers need to learn skills to manage specific behaviours. Enhancing practical skills will help improve communications and interactions with the person with dementia. As the disease progresses, new caregiving skills may be necessary.

### **2. Develop coping and problem solving skills**

- Successful caregivers develop mature coping strategies and demonstrate high self-efficacy. To accomplish this, the caregiver must rely on problem solving and acceptance.

### **3. Improve emotional regulation**

- Caregivers need to learn to keep their emotions in check. Exhibiting high expressed emotions and/or relying on emotion-focused coping is ineffective.
- Accept changes as they occur.

### **4. Seek professional support**

- It is advisable to build a team of trusted, skilled and knowledgeable people who will support you and the person you're caring for. You will need someone who can help you and help the person who is experiencing the symptoms.

### **5. Leverage your social network to get help**

- Don't rely solely on your own ability to care for your loved one. You'll also want to consider informal care arrangements using family, friends, neighbours, faith communities and volunteer groups. It's important to ask for help. Many family and friends will offer help, however most caregivers don't ask.

### **6. Know what community resources are available**

- There are many community organizations available to assist you as you're caring for your loved one. Often the services offered by these groups are low-cost or even free, such as respite care, adult day programs, support groups, transportation, in-home assistance and meal delivery programs.

## **7. Optimize your own physical and psychological health**

- As the disease progresses, it will become increasingly important to manage your level of stress by finding ways to relax.
- Try using different relaxation techniques to manage your levels of stress. Here is a list of some examples for you to consider trying:
  - Exercise – physical activity in any form can help reduce stress and improve overall well-being. Even 10 minutes a day can help.
  - Visualization – mentally picturing a place or situation that is peaceful
  - Yoga
  - Meditation
  - Breathing exercises – slowing your breathing and focusing on taking deep breaths
  - Progressive muscle relaxation – tightening and then relaxing each muscle group, starting at one end of your body and working your way to the other end

## **8. Be realistic**

- You will need to be realistic with your expectations and understand that many behaviours cannot be controlled. Avoid the temptation to ‘correct’ mistakes, criticise, show disappointment or get angry with the person as it will only cause confusion and distress.

## **9. Give yourself credit, not guilt**

## **10. Take a break**

- Find opportunities to stay connected to family, friends and activities that you love. Even 30 minutes a week can make a difference.