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# Reclaiming Our Personal Strength: Tools for Managing the Stress of Caregiving

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# An Overview...

- Defining family caregivers
- Steps for Addressing Personal Stress
  - Step 1 – Recognizing the warning signs
  - Step 2 – Identifying the sources
  - Step 3 – What you can and cannot change
  - Step 4 – Taking action – tools for managing stress.

***(Taking Care of You: Powerful Tools for Caregivers)***



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“Life is not the way it’s supposed to be. It’s the way it is. The way you cope with it is what makes the difference...

I think if I have one message, one thing before I die that most of the world would know, it would be that the event does not determine how to respond to the event.

That is a purely personal matter.

The way in which we respond will direct and influence the event more than the event itself.”

- Virginia Satir

# Family Caregivers...





# providing care - monthly, weekly, daily...



# Demographics...

- Approximately 34.2 million Americans provide unpaid care to an adult 50 or older
- Approximately 15.7 million adult caregivers care for someone who has a dementia diagnosis
- \$470 billion is the estimated economic value of services provided by family caregivers
- 75% of all caregivers are female
- 65% of all care recipients are female, average age 69.4.

***National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP 2015***

# Steps for Reducing Personal Stress

## Step 1 - Recognize the warning signs



# Early Warning Signs of Stress...

- Do you feel tired or exhausted much of the time?
- Are you becoming increasingly isolated?
- Are you increasing irritable or impatient with others?
- Do you have sleep problems such as difficulty falling asleep at night or awakening early?
- Are you experiencing appetite changes?

*Taking Care of You: Powerful Tool for Caregivers*



# Warning Signs are Telling Us...

- Stop and pay attention
- Evaluate what is happening
- Listen to those around us who may see the warning signs we might be missing
- **It's just like the flashing red light on our car dashboard – don't ignore it!**
- The earlier we see the signs, the better our chances for making positive changes.

## Step 2 – Identifying the Sources of Stress

*You may be surprised – not all sources of stress are what you may first think*



# Sources of Stress may be...

- Disagreements among family members
- A lack of open communication with you and the person you care for
- Other demands on your time, energy or money
- Feeling a loss of freedom to do what you want to do
- Feeling that ***no one else*** can do the caregiving job as well as you do.

# Identifying the Sources of Stress...

- Important to identify early before the sources overwhelm you
- Too often, caregivers push until their own health suffers
- ***Not caring for yourself benefits no one – not you and definitely not the person you care for.***

# Step 3 – What You Can and Cannot Change

## *The Serenity Prayer*

*“God grant me Serenity to accept the things  
I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can, and  
Wisdom to know the difference.”*

*Reinhold Niebuhr, 1934*



# Your Caregiving Situation...

- Identifying what you can change can give you a sense of control
- **The only person you can change is yourself!**
- You can't change the diagnosis of the person you care for but you can learn more about it
- Reach out and accept support from others
- Try to identify unrealistic expectations
- Let go of what you cannot change.

# Step 4 – Taking Action to Manage Stress

*Practicing self-care  
learning techniques that lower stress  
developing plans of action*



# Our Thoughts, Beliefs and Perceptions...

- Reframing
  - Changing your role from “caregiver” to “care manager” allows you to accept help from others to get the job done
- Self-talk
  - Changing from negative to positive self-talk takes practice!

# Self-Care...

- Attending to your own health care
- Eating nutritious food
- Getting enough rest
- Taking time off for yourself
- Exercising regularly
- Participating in nurturing activities.

# Social Support...

- Talking to a supportive friend or family member
- Reaching out to a trusted professional advisor
- Reconnecting with your spiritual community
- Consider joining a caregiver support group
- Learn about disease-specific organizations.



# Stress Reducing Techniques...

- Find ones that are quick and easy to build into your daily schedule
  - Relaxation breathing
  - Gratitude Journals
  - Joy Breaks
  - Mindful meditation
  - Action plans.

*Powerful Tools for Caregivers and Dr. Arvid Straube*

# Deep Relaxation Breathing

- 1. Close your eyes if possible. If not, lower your gaze to help focus.*
- 2. Inhale to a count of seven, slowly and deeply through your nose.*
- 3. Exhale to a count of seven through your mouth, slowly and deeply.*
- 4. Continue for 2 minutes - don't force your breathing. If distracted, just refocus on your breathing.*



# Gratitude Journals

- Taking time each day to remember 3 things you are grateful for
- Don't spend a lot of time thinking - just what first comes to mind -
  - “having enough to eat”
  - “a good night's sleep”
  - “my (spouse, child, friend) for supporting me.”







# Resiliency and Joy Breaks

- Resiliency is an innate strength that people can use in times of stress to help move forward in difficult situations.
- It's possible to improve and strengthen our resiliency – “emotional intelligence.”
- “Joy breaks” - *Dr. Arvid Straube*
  - Take a moment, close your eyes, and think of something that brings you joy.



# Mindfulness



# Mindful Meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes or lower your gaze to better concentrate
- Relax your body by first tightening then relaxing your major muscles
- Be aware of your breathing, naturally breathing in and out
- You can choose a word or a phrase for focus.



# Mindful Meditation continued...

- You can use the breathing and words together for example, focus on “I” on the in-breath and “AM” on the out-breath.
- You’ll have distracting thoughts – when your mind wanders, bring your focus back to your breath and chosen words.
- Pick the time that’s right for you – start with a few minutes, then build to 10 or 20 minutes.





# Action Plans

- 1. What are you going to do?*
- 2. How much you are going to do?*
- 3. When you are going to do it (i.e. what time of day)?*
- 4. How often you are going to do it?*

***How confident are you that you will complete your action plan this week on a 0 – 10 scale?***

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# Action Plan Example

**This week I will read a favorite book (*what*) for a half-hour (*how much*) in the mid-afternoon when my spouse sleeps (*when*), three times – Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (*how often*). Confidence level - 8**

***A confidence level less than 6 is good feedback for yourself - try revising the action plan for a more achievable goal.***

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## In Summary...

Again, the words of Virginia Satir –

*“Life is not the way it’s supposed to be.*

*It’s the way it is.*

*The way you cope with it*

*is what makes the difference...”*









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thank you



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