

# Catholic Caregivers

*'Caregiving is pro-life!'*

## Caregiving Stress: Warning Signs

Caring for a loved one is such demanding work that stress can become a major factor in coping with the situation. The symptoms you may experience are similar to the symptoms of depression.

***Here are some warning signs that stress is taking its toll:***

- You feel angry or irritable and just want to deny the whole situation is even happening.
- You feel as if you don't have the time or energy to "waste" on pleasant activities, and you become more isolated.
- You find it hard to concentrate because you are constantly thinking about your loved one's needs and what you have to do.
- You feel more and more depressed.
- Even though you are exhausted, you have problems sleeping.
- You start to develop health problems of your own.

***You may feel stress for any number of reasons:***

- There are multiple demands on your time and energy, but you feel as if you should be doing more.
- Some tasks and responsibilities are in direct conflict with others, and you're worried that you can't do it all.
- It seems that everyone has high expectations of you.
- You don't have the knowledge you need of aging issues and of your loved one's illness, so sometimes you don't know what to do.
- You feel you can't meet the ever-increasing needs of your loved one.
- You have limited access to the support you need and limited money to cover the costs of care.
- You feel "stuck" or "trapped" in the role of caregiving and don't know if you can do it for much longer.
- You're embarrassed when you take your care-receiver to appointments or out for dinner.
- You, your care-receivers and immediate family member don't agree on everything.

- You feel "put upon" because of lack of support.
- You feel as if your life's been taken from you.
- There is a general lack of communication—with your loved one, his or her doctor, your immediate family members.
- Your family and friends express negative attitudes about your role as a caregiver.
- It is hard to watch a loved one's gradual but progressive decline.
- There are problems in other parts of your life (work, spouse, children, prior commitments).
- You miss your own life, your friends, your privacy.

### Tips for the Caregiver

- Be aware of the presence of God and nourish your spiritual life.
- Plan ahead. Don't wait for a crisis.
- Don't panic.
- Be creative. If your first solution doesn't work, find a new one and try again.
- Get reliable information about your loved one's illness and be aware of any emotional issues.
- Learn about your role as a caregiver and improve your skills.
- Practice new coping strategies for the particular challenges you face in caring for your loved one.
- Find your family's strengths and work together.
- Accept offers of informal support from your family, friends, and parish community.
- Respect yourself and set limits.
- Take care of yourself with rest, good nutrition, exercise, and some time off.
- Access the formal support of social services in your community.
- Follow the advice of St. Francis of Assisi:  
**"Start by doing what's necessary,  
then what's possible,  
and suddenly you are doing the impossible."**