

# Take a Break: Take Care of Yourself

Written by Kay Mayberry, University of Illinois Extension Educator, Family Life

Surveys show that many caregivers frequently feel frustrated, anxious, and depressed. They often experience physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomach disorders, and sleeplessness.

Helping a dependent adult should not mean giving up your whole life. The well-being of the care-receiver may depend on how you feel. If you neglect yourself, you may be less effective in caring for another adult.

## Ways to Manage Caregiver Stress

There are times when caregiver stress cannot be avoided, but it can be managed. Here are some ways to help you maintain your health and well-being.

- Express your feelings to someone. Caregiver support groups are available in many communities. Caregivers can share their feelings and exchange ideas and resources.
- Rid yourself of the mental attitude that you have to do it all.
- Delegate responsibilities to other family members or to service providers in the community.
- Take care of your physical health. Eat balanced meals and exercise regularly.
- Continue the social activities you enjoy.
- Keep involved with groups and hobbies. This is not the time to lose contact with friends and family members.
- Take time for yourself. Schedule time away from your caregiving duties. Don't be caught with a "martyr complex," thinking you are the only person who can be the caregiver.
- Avoid negative ways of coping with stress. Overeating, alcohol and drug misuse, and directing your stress at someone else are destructive ways of dealing with stress problems.
- Encourage the care-receiver to be as independent as possible. Work together to solve problems and figure out ways the care-receiver can help himself.
- Ask for help. Attempting to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is an impossible task.

Maintaining your energy and vitality as a caregiver is important to you and your family. Exhaustion and burnout can be reduced if you learn to take care of yourself.