

## Caregiver Burden, Burnout, and Compassion Fatigue

*Compassion fatigue* is often thought of as occurring in professional caregivers, as a natural consequence of the stress resulting from caring for individuals in need. Reflecting deep feelings of suffering, sorrow, or sympathy to the point of exhaustion, compassion fatigue is associated with a desire to alleviate the pain or suffering of another. Although commonly seen in formal care providers, family caregivers of persons with dementia are at a great risk for this type of burnout.

- What are the warning signs?  
Hopelessness, helplessness, apathy, emotional disengagement, or isolation
- What are the consequences?  
Depression, caregiver strain, decreased relationship quality, premature placement of loved one in care community, abuse, and neglect.
- This can occur when:  
Loved one lives at home  
Loved one lives in care community

### *Why am I at risk?*

- If you feel empathy for your loved one, if you have concerns about their wellbeing, and if you are emotionally attached to that person, you are at risk for caregiver burnout or even compassion fatigue.
- Caregiving for someone with dementia puts you at a higher risk because:
- You feel that your loved one with dementia is suffering. Exposure to perceived suffering is a risk factor for any illness; however chronic suffering is particularly true for persons with dementia as family members may feel helpless to change the course of the disease.

*Caring for a parent with dementia was described by one adult child as “the funeral that never ends.”*

- You will be a caregiver longer. Dementia caregivers care for longer periods of time than caregivers for other chronic illnesses, 71% care for more than 1 year; 32% care for 5 years or more.
- It is very difficult for you to take time away from your loved one for a “break.”

## ***How can I avoid or deal with Caregiver Burnout?***

- **Accept help. You cannot do this alone! Accept help when family members, friends, and neighbors offer.**
- **Respite. Realize that in order for you to care for your loved one, you need a break. Be open to respite care and let go of the guilt of “leaving” your loved one.**
- **Have an outlet. Find time for something that you love and DO IT! You are still you, and you must take time to enjoy life.**
- **Go with the flow. Let go of things that aren’t important and focus on the big picture.**
- **Talk to someone. A counselor, a therapist, a pastor, someone that is trained to help will be a valuable resource for you if you feel any of these symptoms.**
- **Continue your support group. These are the people that understand what you are going through, keep going to meetings!**

### **Reference**

*(Day, J. & Anderson, R. 2011. Compassion Fatigue: An Application of the Concept to Informal Caregivers of Family Members with Dementia. Nursing Research and Practice, Vol. 2011. Doi: 10.1155/2011/408024)*