



Signs of Caregiver Stress

Taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or one of the other dementias is very stressful. Caregivers react to their stress in different ways. Below are some possible reactions.

If you answer 'yes' to **any** of these questions, you are suffering caregiver stress. The more 'yes' answers you give, the closer you are to burning out. Take some time to consider how you might take better care of yourself and talk to your doctor

Have you withdrawn from close friends?

Fewer visits? Shorter phone calls? Routine refusals of invitations? The responsibilities of caregiving almost always involve seeing less of more casual acquaintances, but if you've withdrawn from close friends, you are in distress.

Have you given up your favourite pastimes?

The demands of caregiving always mean less time for gardening, movies, hobbies and other activities you enjoyed before you became an Alzheimer's caregiver. But cutting them out completely, or almost completely, is a sign of distress.

Are you feeling persistently blue, irritable, helpless or hopeless?

These are classic signs of depression. Of course, taking care of anyone with dementia is inherently depressing. It's awful to watch a loved one decline and have to take over management of another person's life. But if you develop any of these symptoms, you are in distress.

Do minor upsets make you cry?

This is another symptom of depression. It's natural to be moved to tears as you watch the affected individual lose a long cherished skill, for example, pie making or woodwork. But if you find yourself weeping frequently over small things, you are in distress.

Do minor upsets make you furious?

Are you yelling at your loved one more? Are you finding it more difficult controlling your temper? It's natural to go over the edge if the person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia breaks a precious family heirloom. But if you lose your temper when a friend arrived 15 minutes late for a date or when your children leave some dishes unwashed, or when the person in the supermarket express checkout queue has 15 items instead of the limit of 12, you are in distress.

Have you gained or lost more than two kilograms in the last few months?

Weight changes are another sign of depression / stress / burnout.

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Do you have trouble sleeping?

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or dementia can cause periodic anxiety dreams, nightmares and unwelcome wake-ups in the early morning. If you experience frequent sleep disturbances, you are in distress.

Do you feel exhausted all the time?

The demands of caring for someone with Alzheimer's are exhausting. If you frequently wake up feeling you can't get out of bed despite a good night's sleep, you are in distress.

Do you seem to be getting ill more often than you used to?

The immune system is what protects us from illness and helps us recover when we get sick. Many things impair the function of the immune system such as fatigue, depression and stress.

It's natural for Alzheimer's caregivers to catch an extra cold or two a year because of the demands of caregiving. In fact, a study carried out in 1996 in Ohio, USA, showed that flu vaccinations were less effective in Alzheimer's caregivers because the stress of caregiving had impaired their immune function.

Have you recently developed any chronic health problems?

These might include headaches, back or neck pain, stomach distress, diarrhoea, and heart palpitations amongst others. It is natural to have these conditions from time to time but if they become persistent, you are in distress.

Do you ever think "I can't do this anymore"?

It is natural to react to life's daily pressures and absurdities by occasionally feeling like you want to escape. When such fantasies become frequent, you are in distress.

It is essential to discuss any medical conditions with your general practitioner and also have regular medical check-ups.

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