

## **Managing Caregiver Stress**

By Angus Campbell

Caring for a family member or friend is challenging, often in a variety of ways. Although many caregivers are proud and feel it is their duty and responsibility, they may be unaware of the effect the caregiving role is having on them. “Caregiver burden” has become an issue that has attracted a good deal of attention from researchers in recent years. This is an important topic because caregiver burden can lead to caregiver stress that in turn can lead to caregiver burnout.

Caregivers consistently report they face a number of hurdles and barriers such as financial hardship, feelings of being emotionally drained, frustration with their situation, and a perception that there is a lack of support and understanding from family members and the healthcare system. Some of those offering care have self-doubts about whether they are doing things right or whether they’re doing enough for their loved one. Caregivers often focus so much on their care recipient that they forget to take care of themselves—some even lose their sense of self-identity.

For the caregiver who is still working, the situation may be even more daunting.

It’s important for all of us that the challenges and stresses of caregiving are managed before the caregiver burns out. Once that happens, they may not be able to perform their role again. We could have one person, or even two, having to enter long-term care.

Burnout is characterized as a state of exhaustion, both physical and psychological, and it is often accompanied by feelings of anxiety and depression.

One potential way of handling the stress that almost all caregivers experience is to attend a peer support group. Many participants report the benefits of being able to listen and be heard with others in similar situations. They no longer feel alone. They don’t feel judged by people who understand. In my experience, support groups may not be for everyone, but you’ll never know until you try.

To feel more confident in caregiving skills and knowledge, attend workshops, conferences, and other free services from organizations such as Caregivers Nova Scotia, the Alzheimer Society, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Parkinson Canada, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, and Community Links. Caregivers Nova Scotia offers Caregiver Stress Management workshops throughout the province.

Reach out to these organizations to see how they can help you. Please give us a call at Caregivers Nova Scotia toll-free at 1.877.488.7390 or [www.CaregiversNS.org](http://www.CaregiversNS.org), and we will be happy to assist you.

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