



A Healthy Outlook!

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CAREGIVER STRESS: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

Caring for a loved one can be a strain on even the most resilient individuals. If you are a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and well-being.

When you hear the word “caregiver,” you might picture someone caring for a parent with Alzheimer’s disease. But a caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need, whether that is an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative. Indeed, more than 65 million Americans provide care to loved ones.

If you are among them, you know that taking care of someone who needs your assistance can be very rewarding. But it also can exact a high toll, which is why caregiver stress is common. Caregiver stress is the emotional and physical strain of caregiving. Individuals who experience the most caregiver stress are the most vulnerable to a decline in their own health.

Many caregivers fall into the trap of believing that they have to do every-

thing by themselves. Do not make that mistake. Take advantage of the many resources and tools available. Remember, if you do not take care of yourself, you will not be able to care for anyone else.

Signs of caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you do not realize that your own health and well-being are suffering. Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- ♦ Feeling tired most of the time
- ♦ Feeling overwhelmed and irritable
- ♦ Sleeping too much or too little
- ♦ Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- ♦ Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy

Too much stress, especially over a long time, can harm your health. As a caregiver, you are more likely to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. In addition, you may not get

enough physical activity or eat a balanced diet, which only increases your risk of medical problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Tips for dealing with caregiver stress

The emotional and physical demands involved with caregiving can strain even the most capable person. That is why it is so important to take advantage of available help and support. These tips have helped others deal with caregiver stress:

- ♦ **Ask for and accept help!** Often, people want to be useful, but they may not always know what to do—let other family members and friends know what they can do to share in the responsibility of caregiving. Don’t forget to consider asking people who live at a distance, as well as neighbors and people from faith-based groups or clubs, to pitch in and help you.

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“Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.”

~ THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY (1825-1895)

Caregiver Stress

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- ♦ **Do not give in to guilt.** Feeling guilty is normal, but understand that no one is a “perfect” caregiver. You are doing the best you can at any given time. Your house does not have to be perfect, and no one will care if you eat leftovers three days in a row. You do not have to feel guilty about asking for help.



- ♦ **Get informed.** Organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Alzheimer’s Association offer classes on caregiving, and local hospitals may have classes about the specific disease your loved one is facing.
- ♦ **Seek emotional and moral support** from other caregivers—there is great strength in knowing you are not alone. Many communities have support groups for family caregivers organized through local hospitals, churches, and/or community centers.
- ♦ **Maintain or establish social interaction** with friends and other family members. Isolation can further increase feelings of stress. Getting the chance to have fun, laugh, and focus on something other than your at-home caregiving responsibilities can help you keep stress at bay and maintain emotional balance.
- ♦ **Practice healthy eating and drinking habits.** Avoid giving in to stress-driven urges such as overeating and/or overindulging in alcohol.

- ♦ **Exercise regularly.** Even if it means finding someone else to take over your caregiver duties, getting regularly scheduled exercise—for example, walking, swimming, yoga, biking, or aerobics—can be of tremendous benefit to both your physical and emotional well-being.
- ♦ **Get adequate rest.** Sleep deprivation can sap your energy, distort your thinking, and cause your mind and your body to become stressed far beyond healthy limits.
- ♦ **Seek professional help.** If you experience any signs of depression—for example, extreme sadness, trouble concentrating, withdrawal, or hopelessness—do not delay in getting professional help for yourself. Depression is a serious condition, but it definitely is treatable. If left untreated, depression does not just go away; instead, the symptoms get progressively worse and can even become debilitating. Call the EAP for help in finding a qualified mental health provider.

Respite care

Respite is temporary relief to support families who provide ongoing care to frail elderly persons, children and adults with developmental disabilities, and children with severe medical or behavioral problems. Respite is provided on a short-term, periodic basis, giving the family a break from continuous care-giving duties. Respite care can take a variety of forms, including the following:

- ♦ **Adult care centers.** Many adult care centers are located in churches or

community centers. Some care centers provide care for both elderly adults and young children, and the two groups may spend time together.

- ♦ **Day hospitals.** These hospitals provide medical care during the day. In the evening, your loved one returns home.
- ♦ **In-home respite.** Health care aids come to your home to provide companionship, nursing services, or both.
- ♦ **Respite houses.** Some communities have assisted-living homes, memory-care facilities, and nursing homes that accept people needing care for short stays, to provide temporary relief to caregivers.

You are not alone

If you are like many caregivers, you have a hard time asking for help, which can lead you to feel isolated, frustrated, and even depressed. Rather than struggling on your own, take advantage of local resources for caregivers. To talk to someone about specific services available right here in Montgomery County, call the Aging and Disability Resource Center at 240-777-3000 (TTY 240-777-4575) or find it on the web at www.montgomerycountymd.gov and search for Aging and Disability Services. To learn about services located elsewhere, give the EAP a call and we will be glad to help you.

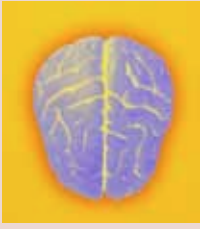
Ask the EAP:

Q. A co-worker of mine is in need of some personal counseling, but primarily speaks Spanish. Does anyone on the EAP staff speak Spanish?

A. YES! We have a graduate social work intern from the University of Maryland on our staff who speaks Spanish. Until April, she is available to provide bilingual services to the Spanish-speaking employees of MCPS. Have your co-worker contact the EAP office and ask for Laura Michael for assistance.

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send your questions via Outlook to Jeff Becker at Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org.

BIOFEEDBACK Treats Pain



There are several highly effective modern biofeedback therapies for managing pain symptoms arising from conditions such as migraines

and sinus headaches, shoulder and neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and TMJ dysfunction.

Surface Electromyography (sEMG)

is a painless, non invasive method of observing and documenting muscle strength and balance. The pain of headache, carpal tunnel syndrome, and TMJ can come from dysfunctional muscles of the back, neck, and jaw. A person, from habit or an attempt to guard against pain, may never allow these muscles to relax completely, yet be entirely unaware of this behavior and its contribution to chronic pain.

In headaches, where muscular causes are unappreciated by many medical providers, sEMG can be extremely useful in showing that there is a problem, what that might be, and the best ways of resolving it. sEMG can solve the puzzle of pain, make the causes clearly visible, and help the client modify pain-perpetuating patterns of dysfunctional muscle use, thereby reducing pain intensity and frequency.

Stress-reduction biofeedback helps clients relieve the severe stress that chronic pain inflicts on brain and body. Reactions to stress alone can cause worry and anxiety, panic attacks, muscle tension, high blood pressure, fatigue, sleep disturbances, digestive problems, reduced immune

function, impaired healing, and pain. Breathing disruptions can alter the normal acid/base balance of the body, impacting asthma and irritable bowel, with additional symptoms including light-headedness, palpitations, moodiness, and migraines. Recent developments in biofeedback give us new stress-reduction interventions for treatment of over-breathing (hyperventilation) and under-breathing (hypoventilation) to restore healthy functioning.

Neurofeedback is biofeedback applied to the brain. It can reveal alteration of brain function that is often associated with headache, fatigue, and depression or anxiety. This is, after all, one of the foundations of drug therapies. Antidepressant medications can treat depression. Antianxiety medications can relieve panic attacks and night terrors. But medications prescribed for a specific symptom can have negative side effects. Side effects from neurofeedback are rare. As a result, many people seek neurofeedback when medications have not been satisfactory.

These biofeedback techniques can be combined to create drug-free treatment plans that are tailored to individual needs. They can effectively reduce or eliminate pain by restoring balance and functionality in the brain and body.

Article written by Emily Perlman MS, BCB, SMC-C, a senior biofeedback therapist and stress management consultant at Brain Wellness and Biofeedback Center of Washington. For more information, go to their website at brainwellnessandbiofeedback.com. Printed with permission.

TEEN DATING Violence Awareness

Valentine's Day is fast approaching. Have you thought about what you will get for the one you love? Whatever you decide to get that special someone you call "sweetheart," make sure to get the message across that love is based on equality and mutual respect!

Teen Dating Violence (TDV) Awareness campaigns were launched in 2007 on a national level to raise awareness and promote education to put a stop across the country to increased episodes of dating violence.



Dating violence results in serious injuries and, in some cases, murder within teen relationships. "Love is not abuse" is the central

theme used during the month of February to help "tweens" (the population between the ages of 10 and 13) and teenagers identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and develop safe dating habits.

If you are a parent of a teen, review the following facts, signs, and tips to ensure your child is safe. Teen dating violence is the counterpart to domestic violence and has an equally devastating impact on the lives of the victims. It is defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors to gain and maintain power and control over a dating partner. Tactics may include physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse. Also, everyone should be aware of how the use of technology can advance the perpetration of dating abuse. It can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender-orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, education level, or socioeconomic background. Education and awareness is our best defense against this growing epidemic.

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"The wisest mind has something yet to learn."

~ GEORGE SANTAYANA
(1863 - 1952)

Did you know?

- ♦ Approximately 72 percent of middle school students report “dating” and by high school more than half of them report witnessing dating violence among their peers.
- ♦ One out of four teenagers reports experiencing some form of abuse every year by a peer, whom most victims continue to date after the onset (80 percent).
- ♦ Partner violence is the number one cause of injury to women in the United States, ages 15 to 44—more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

Warning signs that a teenager may be a victim:

- ♦ Withdrawing from activities typically enjoyed, or isolating from friends and family.
- ♦ Unexplained injuries or injuries that don’t match the explanation.
- ♦ Often apologizing for inappropriate comments and behaviors of dating partner.
- ♦ Anxiety or fear expressed about interacting with dating partner (i.e., unable to respond to texts or phone calls right away, comments about partner getting upset if he or she is unavailable).

Red flags that a teenager may be perpetrating the abuse:

- ♦ Extreme jealousy and acting out (against partner).
- ♦ Explosive anger (toward or about partner).
- ♦ Controlling behavior (e.g., dictating what dating partner wears, does, and who partner hangs with).
- ♦ History of acting out violently (against others and/or with animals).

Tips for parents to consider:

- ♦ Don’t be afraid to ask questions and be ready to listen with an open mind.
- ♦ Consider role-playing scenarios to help your tween or teenager practice setting boundaries.
- ♦ Discuss ideas around healthy relationship behaviors based on respect and equality.
- ♦ Educate about both the fun as well as dark sides to dating, to present a balance.
- ♦ Help your teenager create a safety plan (in the event that “love goes wrong”).

If you suspect that your teenager or someone you love is in an abusive relationship, seek help immediately! Remind the person that he or she is not alone, that help is available, and love is not abuse.

CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

The MCPS Cancer Support Group will meet the second Monday of the month, from 4–5 p.m. in CESC, 850 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, room 240.

Any MCPS employee or family member who has cancer or cares about someone with cancer is encouraged to attend. Meeting announcements and topics can be found on the EAP website. Contact Debra Tipton via outlook at Debra_Tipton@mcpsmd.org outlook or by calling the EAP office at 240-314-1040 if you have questions.

January 23rd: FINANCIAL PITFALLS

45 Gude Drive, Maple Room. Discussion Topics to include: lack of financial plan or inadequate plan; improper debt management; lack of estate plan; no tax planning strategy; buying advice over internet; no exit strategy; Workshop presented by F3#, Foundation for Financial Education (<http://www.f3online.org/>) To RSVP please email Jeffrey Becker @ Jeffrey_becker@mcpsmd.org, or call the EAP at 240-314-1040. **Seating limited, RSVP required.**

For more information

- ♦ House of Ruth Maryland 24-hour hotline: 410-889-7884
- ♦ TDV National 24/7 hotline for teenagers: 1-866-331-9474 or Text: “loveis” to 77054
- ♦ Love is Respect (for teenagers, sponsored by Liz Claiborne): www.loveisrespect.org
- ♦ Love is not Abuse (for parents): www.loveisnotabuse.com
- ♦ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

To learn about TDV legislation for Maryland

- ♦ Contact Maryland Attorney General’s Office via website @ www.oag.state.md.us
- ♦ Read HB: 386-The Kristin Marie Mitchell Law at the following link: mlis.state.md.us/2011rs/billfile/hb0386.htm.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

SPECIALISTS: Debbie Tipton
Robyn Rosenbauer
Jeff Becker

EAP at Gaither Road
2096 Gaither Road, Suite 205
Rockville, Maryland 20850
phone: 240-314-1040
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap>

Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.