

## Part 2: Caregiver Stress

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (2008), at least one quarter of American adults currently provide care to their loved ones. This population is expected to increase as the generation of baby boomers will soon become aged. While some caregivers find caregiving to be a rewarding and positive experience, there are others that find caregiving to be stressful,. Home Instead Senior Care (2005) conducted a survey and found that 31% of family caregivers would like more help as well as 25% of caregivers are resentful of other family members not helping out.

WebMD (2008) defines stress as “a reaction to changes that require you to adjust and respond”. The inability of a caregiver to respond to such change can cause physical, mental, and emotional stress which more times than not leads to caregiver burnout. Precursors to caregiver stress are feelings of being overwhelmed and unable to cope and balance the demands that everyday life imposes on them (i.e. work, school, other family obligations).

Typically, caregivers who are stressed experience emotional, physical, and behavioral warning signs and the need to identify and address these issues with helping professionals is critical in order to reduce stress that can lead to physical illness as well as the ability to provide care for loved ones. Therefore, it is imperative for caregivers to take care of their own health (both physical and mental), take steps to involve others in the caregiving process, maintain outside social contacts, and get help from community services and organizations to name but a few.

Most geriatricians, caregiver advisors, and senior helping professionals agree that common tips for avoiding and managing caregiver stress include the following: exercise, meditate, eat well, ask for help communicate needs to others, hydrate, accept help, and get enough sleep. These tips allow caregivers to regroup, help themselves, and provide quality care to their loved one.

The Caregiver Alliance of Suffolk County provides caregivers with assistance by establishing service plans as well as identifying services, referrals, and resources that will best meet your needs. The services provided by the caregiver advisor are free to all caregivers who live or work in Suffolk County or whose elders do. In addition, caregiver advisors also make appropriate referrals as needed for home services (personal care services and homemaking services) that assist caregivers with day-to-day household and personal care activities for their loved one. Please feel free to visit the Caregiver Alliance of Suffolk County at <http://www.caregiveralliance.org> or call the Boston Elder Information Hotline at [617-292-6211](tel:617-292-6211) to learn more about services that will make a positive difference in your role as a caregiver.

Next month's featured article will focus on Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia.