



Caregiver Wellness

“Empowering You To Prevent Burnout”



Eboni I. Green PhD, RN

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What is Caregiver Distress?



Stress in and of itself is not bad. Contrary to popular opinion, stress is needed to function properly. It provides encouragement and the drive to accomplish what you set out to do in life.

However, when stress becomes a way of life, you can easily become distressed. As a carer/caregiver you may find that you are faced with challenging interpersonal relationships with the care team, clients, family and friends. When you are distressed, even close and supportive care teams can experience increased tension. Left unresolved these stressors can result in illness and lead to burnout. Therefore it is vital that you are empowered to nurture your psychological well-being so that you can improve your capacity to care for yourself as you care for your loved one or client.

The Caregiver Wellness: U Model



Distress impacts psychological wellness, which is a part of the Caregiver Wellness: U model, a conceptual model that incorporates the movement

toward social, psychological, physical, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, and financial wellness, while also incorporating the empowerment and resilience necessary to take charge of one's health on a holistic basis. The components are not chronological; rather, they are collective.

What does it mean to be psychologically well?

According to the Caregiver Wellness: U model, being psychologically well means that you have adequate coping skills to deal with the sometimes competing emotions associated with caring for a sick or disabled loved one or client.

Internal Stressors and External Stresses

External stressors

Role fatigue

Occurs when you have so many roles that you become overwhelmed. Being a husband, wife, daughter, and employee can be exhausting. Try to remember that it is not healthy to be everything to everyone else and nothing to yourself.

Economic pressure

Paying medical bills, understanding insurance, and medication costs can be very stressful. Developing a budget and looking closely at insurance and medical benefits to determine costs that may not be covered, and then planning accordingly, can be helpful in reducing stress.

Sandwich generation

Being sandwiched is said to occur when you are caring for children, grandchildren, or maybe even an ill or disabled loved one. Children are staying at home longer, while at the same time, there is a steady increase in the number of seniors and the need to care for a longer period of time. In fact, the average woman is expected to spend seventeen years caring for a child, compared to eighteen years caring for a senior. For those who are sandwiched stress occurs as a result of being stretched between so many roles.

Geographic separation

Caregiving from a distance has its own special set of circumstances. The emotional challenge of trying to care for a family member that does not live close by can be enormous. Support services may be useful to decrease stress.

Internal Stresses

Emotional stress

Emotional stress is experienced when you feel sadness and loss. Dealing with these emotions can be very difficult. You often feel emotional stress in a variety of ways in any given day. There are times when both emotional and physical stress become draining. At such times, having outlets for stress can come in handy. Please refer to the presentation for ideas about strategies for coping with emotional stress.

Grief

You may grieve your loved one's inability to care for himself or herself. You may also grieve the functional loss of your family member while he or she is still living. The grieving process may be continuous, lasting for many years, while our loved one is alive, and continuing for many years thereafter.

Feeling isolated and alone

You may feel as though you are totally alone with the problems you face while caring for those you love. Feelings of isolation can lead to other emotional problems and are often compounded by stress. Having outlets for stress and having someone with whom to confide is essential. Networking with other caregivers and talking to those in situations similar to ours can be of benefit.

Psychological stress can lead to physical problems such as increased susceptibility to colds, headaches, increased or decreased appetite, loss of sleep, and nightmares. You should try not to allow your psychological stress to mount, and if possible, you should avoid repressing internal feelings.

CAREGIVER WELLNESS: EMPOWERING YOU TO PREVENT BURNOUT

Please take a moment to assess your current level of stress. You may rate your stress by answering the following questions.

	Strongly Agree 1	Somewhat Agree 2	Disagree 3
1. I take an hour or two for myself a day to do the things I want to do.			
2. I have hobbies and spend time doing them.			
3. When I am stressed with caregiving duties, I ask for help.			
4. When I ask for assistance from others, I receive it.			
5. I frequently get a good night's sleep.			
6. I take time to exercise regularly.			
7. I eat a well-balanced diet on a regular basis.			
8. I take time to eat without doing other tasks while I am eating.			
9. I have outlets to relieve stress.			
10. I feel I am doing a good job with caregiving.			
11. I have someone to talk to openly about my caregiving duties.			
Please total your score:			

To interpret your score, use the following guide:

If you scored between **0 and 11**, you are probably handling stress well; however, the following suggestions may be of assistance in maintaining or further lowering your stress level.

If you scored between **12 and 22**, you may wish to incorporate a few of the following suggested practices into your daily routine to decrease your current stress level.

If you scored between **23 and 33**, *you may wish to take a close look at the following suggested practices.*

Incorporate them one at a time, until your stress level is lowered. Try retesting in the next thirty days to reevaluate areas where you can further reduce your stress.

The following are suggested principles to decrease stress while caring for a loved one or client.

AUTONOMY IN DECISION MAKING

1 Autonomy (the right to determine your own destiny) in decision making is a cherished right for everyone, but can be especially important for a loved one unable to fully control decisions affecting the way he or she lives. Allowing a loved one control over basic activities, such as bathing, eating, sleeping, and dressing, can increase his or her independence and decrease caregiving-related stress. Yes, this means that sometimes tasks won't be accomplished just as you would see fit. However, as long as your loved one is not harmed, there's no downside to allowing him or her space and time to participate in his or her care. Additionally, assisting a loved one by listening and conveying respect, in conjunction with expressing empathy and allowing him or her to continue having control over activities he or she is still able to perform, is vitally important. Although your first instinct may be to intercede in the decision-making process, you should allow our loved one the space and autonomy necessary to flourish.



BE CONSISTENT

2 I don't know about you, but it is very helpful to me to have someone who is consistent in his or her interactions and dependability. Your loved ones have the potential to be comforted, knowing you will be there to support and care for them in a consistent and loving manner. This does not mean that you will not have good or bad days; what it does mean is that you will work in the best interests of those you love. It also means that you will not act one way one day and another way the next when it comes to caring. Consistency and dependability can be your greatest gifts to reduce feelings of uncertainty and stress.

Maintain Interest outside your Caregiving role

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You can encourage your loved one/client to participate in activities separate from yours. Maintaining an identity outside roles related to caregiving and care receiving is vitally important to stress reduction for all involved in the caring process. Your loved ones still want to feel valued and probably have many contributions outside the illnesses or disabilities from which they suffer that would be valuable to the family and the community. There may be day centers, schools, senior centers, or any number of places our loved ones can attend to socialize and maintain a separate identity. You should not force your loved ones to engage in activities that they see as uncomfortable; however, encouragement can go a long way. The same advice rings true for caregivers: you should look for activities that have nothing to do with providing care. When you have time to yourself, you can return to the situation with a renewed and refreshed perspective. In turn, with a renewed perspective, the opportunity exists to decrease stress and increase longevity in caring for a loved one/ client.

Be Flexible

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Being flexible can decrease the stress you experience. Adjusting expectations and allowing room for improvement are vitally important to your overall longevity as caregivers. Power struggles can result from inflexibility in the rules, in addition to the decision-making process. You will inevitably have days that are better than others. No matter what the day is like, your loved one/client remains valuable as an individual. Tasks may not be performed the way you would prefer; however, if you are inflexible and try to do everything, you will be stressed, and so will your loved ones.

Develop a Plan

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Organizations have the benefit of an entire team of trained staff to assist in providing care. These organizations also usually develop a plan of care. Developing a plan of care using the forms provided in this booklet can assist in giving a visualization of all that is done to assist your loved one/client. Additionally, a plan may be helpful when asking for help in the areas where needs are identified. Writing down a list of accomplishments offers the opportunity to feel better about the care being provided.

Summary

Although your loved ones or client may be dependent on you for some things, they do not have to be dependent for the tasks they can still perform. You can decrease the stress you experience by maintaining your loved ones' or client's autonomy, giving or relinquishing control, and allowing your loved ones /or clients to make decisions. In turn, you won't have to feel as though you have to make every decision. No matter what level of disability your loved ones experience, they still have abilities. By not taking on more duties than necessary, you have the ability to decrease the potential for stress.



Please select a stress management technique from the examples provided. Then, honestly address the following questions.

- What will you do?
- When will you do it?
- What steps must be taken prior to implementation?
- How will you stay on track?
- How will you celebrate your success?

