WELCOA
HEALTH BULLETINS

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WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

CARING FOR YOURSELF WHILE CARING FOR OTHERS:

How to Prevent Burnout & Protect Your Own Health

Millions of Americans provide non-paid assistance and caregiving to a family member or friend experiencing a long-term illness or disability. From grocery shopping to cooking to giving medicine, informal caregivers allow millions of adults to live as independently as possible. Although caregiving is indeed rewarding, it can certainly take its toll on your own physical, emotional and financial health. Fortunately, you don't have to go it alone. There are several resources and tools at your disposal—you just have to leverage them!

Tap into the right online forums. Having a non-judgmental and supportive place where you can share thoughts, tips and strategies with people going through the same experiences can prove tremendously helpful.

TAKE ACTION: A few great organizations that provide support groups for caregivers include Caring.com and AgingCare.com—just look for the "support" tabs on the sites' homepage.

Complete quick and simple assessments. Many caregivers dismiss their own feelings of fatigue and frustration because they feel guilty doing so ("The person I'm caring for is very sick. What I'm feeling is no comparison."). However, the reality is that you should never take your own health for granted, and you need to do everything within your power to preserve it—after all, you can't take care of your friend or loved one if you become ill.

TAKE ACTION: Take stock of your physical and emotional health. The National Alliance for Caregiving offers a Self-Assessment Questionnaire that will help you analyze your own behavior and health risks. Based on your results, you can view recommendations and resources to address any issues. You can find the assessment at www.caregiving.org/resources/caregiver-health.

Identify time that could be spent on you. Having adequate time for exercise and relaxation is critically important for everyone, especially caregivers.

TAKE ACTION: Become aware of time that you're letting "slip away" that you could actually be spending on yourself. For example, if you're taking a loved one to the doctor, take a 10-minute walk while waiting or use the time to relax—have a cup of tea and focus on deep breathing.

ARE YOU AT THE BRINK?

If you're a caregiver to a family member or friend, you may be so busy that you don't even realize your own health and/or stress levels have been impacted. However, those who provide care to a family member or friend must absolutely keep their own health at the forefront. Here are some of the warning signs to keep in mind:

Common Signs & Symptoms of Caregiver Stress & Burnout

- You're constantly exhausted, even after sleeping or taking a break
- You're engaging in unhealthy coping behaviors like drinking excessively or smoking
- You can't seem to concentrate
- You neglect your own needs, either because you're too busy or you don't care anymore
- Your life revolves around caregiving, but it gives you little satisfaction
- You have trouble relaxing, even when you're not caregiving
- You're increasingly impatient and irritable with the person you're caring for
- You feel helpless and hopeless

Do not dismiss any of the above items if you're experiencing them. Consider cutting back on your caregiving obligations if possible (either through asking another family member to chip in or through a caregiving service). If you still feel overly stressed or distraught, call your doctor right away so he/she can evaluate you and recommend resources to help.