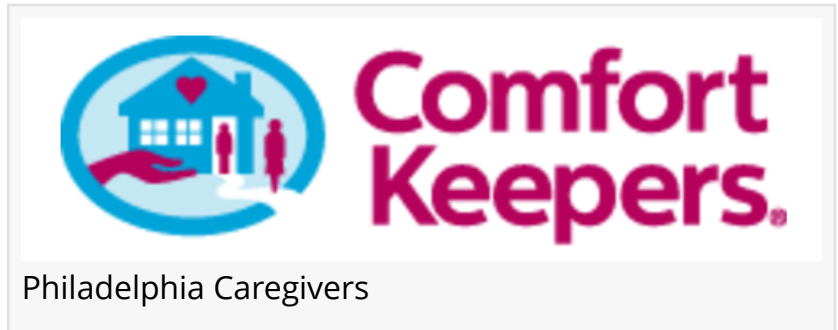


What is Caregiver Burnout?

We often hear the term "burnt out" but what does it actually mean?

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[Understanding Caregiver Burnout](#)

We often heard that a certain profession can cause a person to "burned out," such being a police officer, chef or nurse. We sometimes forget about caregivers; a family member or friend who takes care of an elderly loved one. It's hard to realize a caregiver can experience burn out unless you have been in their shoes. When you commit to taking care of a loved one, you will experience many changes, more so than just having your elderly parent move in with you, but the feeling of being "there" for him or her for all their health needs. This isn't to say that caregiving cannot be a rewarding experience, but the danger of getting burned out is real and can happen to anyone.

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There are so many ways to prevent caregiver burnout it's important to practice these methods.”

Michele Berman, Owner

Caregiver burnout not only affects a person mentally but also physically and emotionally. The physical effects are accompanied by a change in attitude, usually negative. It's

vital that you know the warning signs of caregiver burnout to prevent mental exhaustion and health problems. It can also affect your spiritual health when you feel that you have lost control over your life while caring for a loved one. Caregivers experience of a level of stress that can be detrimental to their overall well-being, including gaining weight and disrupting sleep patterns. If a caregiver is not proactive about preventing burned out, he or she runs the risk of not only becoming chronically sick but ruining the relationship with their loved one and/or family members.

Causes of Caregiver Burnout

The caregiver stress and physical issues stem from:

Unrealistic Expectations: It's only natural that you want to ensure that everything is perfect for your loved one, including a positive attitude all the time. This is unrealistic because there will be caregiver responsibilities that you will dread. Also, if your loved one has Alzheimer's, where mood swings are evident, the positive effect will go to waste quickly. It's important from the very beginning to know what you are getting yourself into. Educating yourself on not only the responsibilities you will have but their lasting effects will help you be aware of what your loved needs and to ensure a happy home. Also, your healthcare provider can provide additional resources (e.g. fact sheets) on the disease your elderly parent is suffering from, such as Parkinson's disease, or how to be an efficient caregiver.

Lack of Control: We cannot control every situation (e.g. a parent needing care), this also includes finances and time. Having this lack of control makes caregivers even more pressured to be the best caregiver to their loved one. Accepting that you cannot control everything that goes on your

life and in the life of your loved one will make getting through the day much easier. And when your parent has a progressive disease, such as Alzheimer's disease, there comes a point when you have to accept that you cannot care for him or her any longer. A nursing home or assisted living community may be the solution. Or, even an adult day care center. This doesn't mean that you have given up or failed, it means that you have accepted the fact that you no longer have the skills to care for your loved one.

Unreasonable Demands. In today's society, we all strive to be "perfect." The need to provide excellent home care to an elderly parent or relative is no exception. We try to do everything for everyone, leaving ourselves drained. An example of an unreasonable demand is when a family member wants you to make a certain meal for your elderly parent. This creates an unreasonable burden on the you, the caregiver. Yet, you can also put an unreasonable demand on yourself as declaring yourself as the primary caregiver, where your parent is your exclusive responsibility. To relieve some of the stress, you should ask for help from not just your siblings but from support groups, such as Family Caregiver Alliance.

Unrealistic Goals. By setting unrealistic goals, you are setting yourself up for failure. Remember, you can't be all things to all people. If one of your goals is to stick to a schedule, it won't happen because emergencies can happen at any time. Or, plans fall through at the last minute. The number one goal is to provide a safe and comfortable home for your loved one.

Caregiver Burnout Can Be Prevented

There are many ways to prevent caregiver burnout, where some are more obvious than others. However, it really comes down to the caregiver actively seeking help – not just talking about it. To prevent burnout:

Talk to someone. It's not healthy to keep your emotions bottled up. Eventually, they will take a toll on not just your mind but on your body. You can talk to a family member, friend or a co-worker. Sometimes it's better to take to a stranger, such as a therapist or co-member of a support group. You also need to accept your feelings – this should be your mantra. You must remind yourself that you are not the only caregiver to experience guilt, anger, frustration ... etc.

Schedule "self-care" time. This is easier said than done. But, if you don't reserve time for yourself, you will wear yourself down. It can be anything from reading a book to taking a bubble. Bath. It can also mean getting out the house to meet up with a friend. It is important that you put it on your calendar. When you put it on your calendar, it signifies this time is just as important as taking your parent to his or her doctor's appointment. If you don't have someone to watch your loved one during your "self-care" time, you can arrange for respite care from a home health agency. This type of service gives caregivers a break. An in-home care aide will come to your home to care for your loved one.

We all plan on doing it, but we don't. It has been proven that exercise releases endorphins that give you mood a boost. It is very easy for a caregiver get depressed or have anxiety when caring for a loved one. This can lead to unhealthy habits, such as having more than one drink a day, excessive smoking and over-eating. Over-eating can lead to obesity, which is one cause of heart disease. The American Heart Association offers an online support network for those caring for loved ones with heart disease or have suffered a stroke.

Stay healthy. Eating healthy and getting the proper amount of sleep are necessary to provide the care needed for your loved one. This concept also applies to your mind. There are many ways to reduce stress, including meditation and yoga. Also, don't be afraid to ask your doctor for medical advice on diet and exercise.

Use new technology. Telecare has come a long way. According to Harvard Health, there are telecare devices that can keep track of a loved one's activities. The cellphone makes caregivers' lives easier by storing a loved one's health information, providing guidance and serving as a

tracking device. Sensors can be worn on the body to track vitals as well as dispense medicine.

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About Comfort Keepers Philadelphia:

Owners Michele Berman and her brother, Marc Reisman, took over Huntington Valley Comfort Keepers in 2000, when their father, Richard Reisman, was diagnosed with lung cancer and became increasingly ill. They experienced firsthand the care and comfort provided by Comfort Keepers. In fact, Richard Reisman originally started the business when his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. At that time, there weren't many options for those in need of additional support and quality care. Today, the owners are proud to carry on the legacy of their father, but they are even more proud of the difference Comfort Keepers is making to those who need their help the most.

To find out more about Comfort Keepers' commitment to excellence, please call 215.885.9140.

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