

Don't Be a Statistic!

Tips for Caregivers

Caregivers pre-decease the patient 63% of the time due to stress, self-neglect of health, and other factors. We can change that; in fact, we must! Follow these tips (and advice from your health practitioners) to minimize your risks of becoming part of that statistic.

Take care of yourself – *physically*, including seeing your own doctors, exercising and focusing on good nutrition; *emotionally*, by joining a support group, seeking professional therapy, or even finding a confidant in a friend or neighbor who has had similar experiences; and *spiritually* by taking time to reflect, find faith and hope (for some this means practicing a formal religion, for others it may be connecting with nature, Buddhist practices, etc.).

Get information – learn everything you can in a way that makes it easy for you: books, brochures, lectures in the community or online support. Be careful about online self-education, and ensure your sources are legitimate and not just selling something. Information is power, and the more you know the more prepared you are for anything before it becomes a crisis.

Accept that changes are inevitable – practice emotional flexibility and seek creative ideas for coping with changes which are uncomfortable. Some tips to avoid crisis include: creating an extra sets of keys, making copies of Medicare cards and important papers, ensuring safety by preventing wandering and falls, removing weapons from the home, and destroying old medications.

Manage stress – get organized, plan ahead, identify your support team and put them into action. And surround yourself with things which bring you joy! Plant your favorite flowers and make time to notice them. Put your favorite music in your car. Create a zone in your house that is just for you to escape to when you need it.

Know the signs of depression – Seek help when you need it. Depression will weaken your spirit and your immune system.

Get to know your community's resources – If and when you need it, you will want to know what services and supports are available for your loved one. Avoid making decisions in crisis by having 'the troops ready to mobilize.' Get information on legal and financial planning before you need it.