

Caregiving: A Life in the Balance

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Unique challenges

- Identity changes
- Role changes; juggling multiple roles
- Uncertainty about the future
- Grief
- Stressful behavioural and psychiatric symptoms
- Financial burden
- Isolation
- Sleep disruption

Ambiguous Loss

- “Grieving by inches”
- Person with dementia is physically present but mentally or emotionally different/absent
 - Loss of dreams and plans for future
 - Loss of confidant and partner
 - Loss of shared roles/responsibilities
- Closure not possible; grief can't be fully resolved
- Sometimes difficult for others to know how to provide support

Stress Buffers: Finding Meaning

- **Finding meaning in caregiving mediates burden**

(McLennon & Rice, 2011)

- **Recognize and value your growth as a person**
 - New skills
 - More compassion
 - Inner strength, resilience
- **Recognize and value the importance of your role**

Stress Buffers: Self-Efficacy

- **Caregiver self-efficacy associated with decreased stress** (Romero-Moreno, Losado, 2012)
 - **A belief about your own ability to act competently and capably in different situations**
 - Seek out information and education to learn new skills and tools
 - Watch out for overly negative and upsetting thoughts (“stinking thinking”)

Exercise and Caregiver Stress

- **Physical activity associated with improved psychological well-being in caregivers**

(Romero-Movenno & Losado, 2012)

- Consider exercise a priority rather than a luxury
- Arrange for respite or exercise with your family member
- Combine exercising and socializing
- Try home exercise

Respite!

- **Think of the time you spend away as a way to improve the time you spend together**
 - **Adult day programs associated with lower caregiver stress and depression (Zarit & Klein, 2014)**
 - **Arrange for professional in-home respite care or ask for assistance from family and friends (predictable/scheduled breaks are best!)**
 - **Use respite time for self-care and wellness pursuits**

Social Support

- Higher social support associated with positive psychological well-being
- Social isolation can compound effects of caregiver stress
- Let your friends and family know how they can help you (emotional *and* practical support)
- Seek professional supports to fill gaps in informal support network
- Attend a support group meeting
 - Helps to talk with others in the same place

Signs of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- **Exhaustion, even after sleep or rest breaks**
- **Neglecting own needs, either because too busy or don't care**
- **Life revolves around caregiving, but it gives little satisfaction**
- **Trouble relaxing, even when help is available**
- **More irritability and impatience with care recipient**
- **Decreased empathy for care recipient**
- **Helplessness, hopelessness**
- **More frequent illnesses, pain**
- **Depressed mood, excessive worrying**
- **Insomnia**

Where to go for help?

- **Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba**
 - Individualized supports and support groups
- **Work with family doctor to treat depression, anxiety, insomnia**
- **Community-based counseling services**
- **Request referral for psychological services (private or hospital-based)**
 - Empirically-supported treatments for caregiver stress and depression