

A caregiver's guide to burnout

Caregiving is a rewarding experience, but it also comes with stress. At times, the responsibilities can feel overwhelming, but knowing about caregiver burnout means you can take steps to care for yourself while caring for your loved one.



What is caregiver burnout?

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by the ongoing stress of caring for someone with a chronic disease, such as chronic kidney disease (CKD).

Signs of burnout include:

- Feeling tired all the time
- Changes in your sleep like sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in how much or how often you eat
- Increased feelings of anxiety, irritability, or sadness
- Losing interest in things you once enjoyed, like hobbies or spending time with friends
- Getting sick more often
- Feeling overwhelmed

Why does it happen?

Caregiving is rewarding, but it is also demanding and requires a lot of your time. Common contributors to burnout may include:

- Trying to balance caregiving with work, family, and other responsibilities
- Having little or no time for rest or self-care
- The emotional toll of watching someone you love live with CKD
- Financial strain from caregiving costs or missed work
- Feeling like you don't have enough support



Burnout does **not** mean you are failing, it means you need support too.

Taking care of yourself as a caregiver

Caring for yourself isn't selfish – it's necessary. Taking small steps every day to support yourself can make a big difference in how you feel. Here are some practical ways to take care of yourself as a caregiver:

1

TAKE BREAKS (EVEN SHORT ONES)

Taking a break doesn't have to mean a day off. It can sometimes feel difficult to step away from your caregiving duties, but even a short, planned pause can help. Try scheduling 15 minutes at the same time each day. For example, after lunch you can go for a walk outside, stretch, or even sit quietly.

If you share caregiving responsibilities with someone else, let them know when you'd like to take that time so you can plan around it together. If you are the only caregiver, look for ways to build small breaks into your routine – like listening to music while doing chores, taking a few deep breaths before bedtime, or asking a friend to check in regularly so you have a moment to recharge.

2

ASK FOR HELP

It can feel uncomfortable to ask for help. Be specific about what support you need. This will make it easier for others to support you. A specific request can look like:

- "Could you pick up groceries on Tuesday so I can rest?"
- "Would you mind staying with [care recipient name] for an hour so I can go to my appointment?"
- "Can you find services that offer short-term help for caregivers near me? I'm planning a vacation and want to know my options."

3

KEEP UP WITH YOUR OWN HEALTH

It's easy to set your own health to the side when you're focused on taking care of someone else. You can do small things each day to take care of your physical health including:

- **Stay hydrated:** Carry a reusable water bottle with you – set it next to your coffee mug in the morning as a reminder to fill it up to stay hydrated throughout the day
- **Move when you can:** Try going on a 10-minute walk or doing gentle stretches while dinner cooks
- **Focus on eating fruits and vegetables at every meal:** Place whole fruit on your counter so it's easy to grab on the go, or keep cut-up veggies in the fridge for quick snacking
- **Aim for a good night's sleep:** Even short naps during the day can help if a full night is difficult
- **Plan simple meals and snacks** like yogurt, nuts, or fruit ahead of time to make eating healthy easier

It's also important to attend your own healthcare appointments. You may find it helpful to schedule your appointments around the same time as your care partner's. Keeping a calendar, either virtually or physically, can help you keep track of all appointments.

4

STAY CONNECTED

Caregiving can feel isolating, especially if most of your day is spent at home or alone with your care partner. Look for ways to keep your social relationships active:

- Send a quick text to a friend during a quiet moment
- Schedule a weekly phone or video call with a friend or family member to catch up
- Join an online caregiver group where others understand what you're going through



5

PRACTICE STRESS RELIEF THAT WORKS FOR YOU:

There are many stress relief techniques out there, find what works best for you, and incorporate it into your daily routines. Some techniques include:

- Journaling, which can be as simple as writing down one or two thoughts in a notebook before bed, so your mind feels lighter
- Listening to your favorite song or podcast while you cook or drive
- Doing a short breathing exercise while waiting at the doctor's office
- Stepping outside for fresh air when you feel overwhelmed

When to speak up

If you are feeling overwhelmed, let the healthcare team know. They are there to support you and your care partner and likely know of resources in your community.

Resources for caregivers

You are not alone in your caregiving journey. Support is available:

- Local or online caregiver support groups
- Counseling or therapy for emotional support
- [National Alliance for Caregiving](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance](#)



REMEMBER:

Caring for yourself is part of caring for your loved one. Showing up for yourself means showing up for them.



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