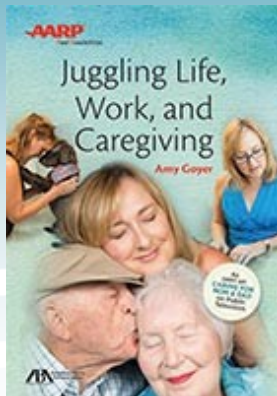


# Caregivers: How to Deal with Stress and Burnout

Adapted from *Juggling Life, Work and Caregiving* by Amy Goyer



**“I don’t expect my car to run on an empty tank, and I can’t expect myself to either! It’s not selfish to take care of myself, it’s practical.”**

-Amy Goyer, Author,  
*Juggling Life, Work and Caregiving*

**More than half of family caregivers report feeling overwhelmed** by the amount of care that loved ones need. That can result in stress, and in the extreme, stress results in burnout. As caregivers, we give and give and give. The prolonged stress builds up, we are robbed of energy, and sometimes we reach a point of total emotional, mental and physical exhaustion.

## 10 Signs You May be in Burnout

If you feel like this most of the time, rather than now and then, you may be in burnout if:

1. You lose motivation completely or feel we just don’t care—about our loved ones’ care, our other relationships or our work.
2. You feel that you’ve lost yourself – your own identity - in the vastness of caregiving.
3. You feel completely powerless and believe that nothing you can do will make a difference for those you are caring for.
4. You are contemplating walking away from those you are caring for without a backup plan (or you have already done so).
5. You are suffering severe health problems as a result of focusing all your efforts on caregiving and not enough on caring for yourself.
6. Your work, family and other relationships are extremely negatively affected because you have no energy to maintain them.
7. Your finances are out of control; you are unable to keep up with the practical day to day aspects of your life.
8. You have a marked increase in or are abusing substances such as illegal or prescription drugs or alcohol.
9. Your sleep and eating patterns are highly disturbed – you are either sleeping or eating too much or too little.
10. You are extremely depressed, having suicidal thoughts or extreme feelings of hopelessness and frequently crying. You can’t remember the last time you felt truly happy.

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**Text “AMY” to 97779 for tips**

## 8 Ways to Deal with Caregiver Burnout

To prevent burnout, and to deal with it when it happens, it's important to manage stress on an ongoing basis.

### 1. Keep Filling Your Own Tank

- Be aware of what fills your tank
- **Quick tank-fillers:** call a friend, walk around the block, get coffee/tea, create quick joy
- **Premium fill-ups:** Take a break, go to a movie, take a class, spend time with friends
- **Tune-ups:** Longer breaks, vacations, go to a meaningful place
- **Routine Maintenance:** Sleep, healthy food, exercise, massage, support group, daily joy

### 2. Get help

- If you feel overwhelming sadness and depression or have suicidal thoughts, DO NOT just wait for it to pass. Get help immediately. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) or the National Hopeline Network at 800-442-HOPE (4673).
- Seek professional counseling or medical care or meet with a life coach
- Accept offers from friends and family
- Get support for your own life (such as cleaning, yard care, running errands, organizing paperwork, paying bills)
- Meet with a financial advisor to help you gain control of finances
- Meet with an employment counselor or your human resources department to investigate flexible work options
- Try family mediation with family members who are not providing adequate support
- Lean on other caregivers for support, advice and a sympathetic ear

### 3. Monitor your mindset

- Acknowledge emotions
- Be mindful: Focus fully on the current moment rather than multi-tasking
- Ask yourself whether you're operating from fear or love
- Remember why you are caregiving
- Know what you *can* control, and focus less on what you can't control
- Choose positivity – everything we do is a choice
- Don't be driven by "should" (I *should* be doing this or that)

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#### 4. Know your best outlets

- Keep a private journal
- Use technology: Write a blog, post on a social media venue such as Facebook or Twitter or share with an online support group or message board.
- Talk it out: Someone who is not deeply involved in your caregiving situation may be the ideal sounding board, but for some, a relative, spouse or partner can play this role.
- Get moving: The mind-body connection is a reality; you can help release your stress and overflowing emotions through your body.

#### 5. Take breaks

- Grab some quick R & R: relax, have fun, be creative, enjoy plants and flowers, connect with animals, get intergenerational. Even in a few minutes you can refresh.
- Arrange for respite care:
  - Ask friends or relatives to care for your loved ones, either coming to their home or taking them out for dinner, shopping or to a movie. It will be good for your loved ones to get out, and good for you to have some quiet time as well.
  - Find a volunteer-staffed respite program in a faith-based organization or volunteer placement agency.
  - Pay a professional from a home-health agency, or hire one directly yourself, to care for your loved ones in their home.
  - Arrange short-term stay for the people you care for at a hospice respite, assisted living or nursing facility or a group home.
  - Have your loved ones attend an adult day care (or day health) center that offers group activities, services and meals. These centers are usually open five days a week, although some have weekend and overnight programs.
  - Join with other caregivers in your community to create a respite cooperative in which you take turns caring for each others' loved ones.
  - Use a state voucher program in which you select the respite provider and the state supplies vouchers to pay them.
  - To locate an organized respite program in your community, contact your local area agency on aging ([www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)), visit the respite locator ([www.archrespite.org/respitelocator](http://www.archrespite.org/respitelocator)) or contact your local senior center, volunteer agency or faith-based initiative.

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## 6. Maintain your identity

- Nurture yourself
- Cultivate your interests and hobbies
- Cultivate your relationships
- Sustain your professional identity

## 7. Watch your health

- Sleep: I'm convinced that sleep deprivation is the biggest enemy of caregivers because it robs us of our ability to cope and be hopeful.
- Eat well
- Exercise
- Visit your doctors

## 8. Be practical

- Set limits and boundaries with people and responsibilities in your life
- Just say no – when you can without jeopardizing those you are caring for

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