



Caregiver Survival Guide: What You Need to Know

October 26, 2021

What is an informal caregiver?

Informal caregivers are ordinary people who provide physical and emotional support to a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour without pay.¹ So if you, for example, give a family member or friend rides to appointments, help with cooking, cleaning or self care, or do some translation, then you are a caregiver!

Who are informal caregivers?

In Ontario:

- **30% of caregivers** are visible minorities.¹
- **48% of caregivers** were either born outside of Canada, or their parents were born outside of Canada.¹
- Willingness to accept the caregiving responsibility increases with age. **77% of those 65 or older are happy to take on the caregiving role.**¹
- **COVID-19 has made caregiving more difficult:** 58% of caregivers are stressed with the overall management of caregiving, 55% are stressed emotionally and 55% are stressed with juggling work and family responsibilities.¹

Caregiver well-being: What is caregiver burnout?

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. Stressed caregivers may experience fatigue, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms.²

More than one in three caregivers in Canada are experiencing distress, anger or depression.³

Self-Check:

What are the symptoms of caregiver burnout?⁴

- ! Social withdrawal from friends and family and loss of interest in activities
- ! Feeling anxious, blue, irritable, hopeless, helpless, changes in appetite, weight, and sleep patterns.
- ! Emotional and physical exhaustion and the inability to concentrate
- ! Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring.
- ! Anger or frustration toward the person you're caring for

Check in with yourself. Try the **Caregiver Self Assessment Tool** from the American Medical Association: "[How Are You?](#)"

The link above opens a PDF document for you to download and/or print.

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Where can I turn for help for caregiver burnout?³

- **Your doctor:** Suspect you are experiencing burnout? Consider seeking medical attention.
- **Nursing homes or assisted living facilities:** Some homes offer short-term respite stays to provide caregivers a break from their caregiving responsibilities.
- **Caregiver support services:** Support groups and other programs can help caregivers recharge their batteries, meet peers and find information. Check out these examples:
 - **Ontario Caregiver Organization 1:1 Peer Support Program:** connect with a Peer Mentor, share your experiences, and receive direct support.⁵
 - **Alzheimer's Society of Toronto:** facilitates a variety of support groups for people with dementia, family or friends of people with dementia and health care professionals (i.e. PSWs).⁶

Tips to reduce caregiver stress⁴

- **Give yourself a break:** ask a friend or family member to fill in for a few hours or look into options for respite care
- **Nurture relationships:** take the time connect with the people that matter to you
- **Take care of your health:** let your physician know that you're a caregiver and bring up any concerns you may have. Consider a daily relaxation and/or meditation practice.
- **Educate yourself:** attend webinars and talk to professionals in the field. The more you know about the illness, the more effective you will be in caring for the person.

Benefits of caregiving

We often hear about the struggles and sacrifices that caregivers go through, but we rarely talk about the benefits of being a caregiver. Caregiving for others can be very satisfying and meaningful.

- You won't be worried about whether your loved one is receiving good care.⁷
- You will become confident in many other roles in life.⁷
- You will come to understand what you truly value.⁷
- Caregivers working from home since the beginning of the pandemic are more likely to agree that their work is flexible, allowing them to better manage caregiving.²

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About CanAge

CanAge is Canada's National Seniors' Advocacy organization.

We are a non-partisan non-profit organization that educates, empowers and mobilizes people on the issues that matter most to older Canadians and their caregivers.

We work to advance the rights and well-being of Canadians as we age in order to live vibrant and connected lives.

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