



# Caregiver Stress and Management

# Who is a caregiver?

A caregiver is a person who has taken on the responsibility of looking after someone who is unable to care for himself or herself fully due to illness, frailty, disability or a mental health problem.

This person could be a family member, partner, relative, friend, or neighbour. Caregiving can be a rewarding but challenging journey. It becomes stressful when you cannot perform the role at an optimal level.



## Signs and implications of caregiver stress

### ➤ Signs of caregiver stress :

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried.
- Difficulties sleeping.
- Lack of energy.
- Becoming easily irritated or angry.
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- Excessive use of tobacco and alcohol.

### ➤ Implications of caregiver stress :

- Too much stress, especially over a long period of time, can harm your health.
- Caregivers are more prone to mental wellness challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression.
- Lack of proper rest or a balanced diet increases risk of medical problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.
- Chronic caregiver stress can lead to caregiver burnout, where the person experiences complete physical, emotional and mental exhaustion.
- Whereas a person with caregiver stress may say something like “I have too much to handle”, a person who reached burnout may instead say “I’m done caring.”

# Strategies for dealing with caregiver stress

The emotional and physical demands involved with caregiving can strain even the most resilient individual.

## ➤ To help manage caregiver stress :

- **Accept help.**
  - Be prepared with a list of ways that others can help you. For instance, a friend or family member may be able to run an errand or cook for you.
- **Focus on what you can provide.**
  - It is normal to feel guilty sometimes, but understand that no one is a "perfect" caregiver. Believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time.
- **Set realistic goals.**
  - Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Prioritise, make lists, and establish a daily routine.
- **Get connected.**
  - Find out about caregiving resources in your community. Many communities have classes specifically about the disease your loved one is facing. Caregiving services such as transportation, meal delivery or housekeeping may be available.
- **Join a support group.**
  - A support group can provide validation and encouragement, as well as problem-solving strategies for difficult situations. A support group can also be a good place to create meaningful friendships.
- **Seek social support.**
  - Try to stay well-connected with family and friends who can offer emotional support. Set aside time each week for connecting, even if it is just a walk with a friend.
- **Set personal health goals.**
  - For example, set goals to establish a good sleep routine, find time to be physically active on most days of the week, eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water.



- **Get enough sleep.**
  - Many caregivers have issues with sleeping which may cause health issues. If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, talk to your doctor.
- **See your doctor.**
  - Get recommended vaccinations and screenings. Make sure to tell your doctor that you are a caregiver. Do not hesitate to mention any concerns or symptoms you may have.

## Who to contact for external support?

- NuLife for counselling support at **6300 8706 / 9734 1560**.
- The nearest Family Service Centre (FSC). FSCs are community-based social service providers who support individuals and families in need. You can identify the closest FSC for the person via this link: (<https://www.msf.gov.sg/our-services/directories>).
- Respective self-help groups:
  - Chinese Development Assistance Council: **6841 4889**
  - Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura: **6359 1199**
  - Singapore Indian Development Association: **1800 295 3333**
  - Eurasian Community Fund: **6447 1578**
  - Institute of Mental Health at **6389 2222** (*their 24-hour hotline*)
- Agency for Integrated Care (AIC). AIC supports caregivers and care recipients with challenges pertaining to healthcare, socioemotional and financial concerns. AIC hotline: **1800-650-6060**

