



... Help Begins Here!

AMPUTEE CAREGIVERS NEED HELP TOO!

It is common for both the amputee and the amputee caregiver to experience feelings of loss. Persons with an amputation not only have to adjust to the loss of a part of their bodies, but also the loss of abilities that were taken for granted. New ways to function have to be learned, and the process of rehabilitation may be long and difficult. There are many health care professionals focused on the progress of the amputee, but the caregiver (who suffers along with their loved one) is often neglected. This paper addresses the problems, needs and rehabilitation of the caregiver, in whatever way it can help.

As an amputee caregiver, you may experience your own sense of loss. You may have trouble coping with the changes in your own lifestyle due to stress and the added responsibilities of caring for your family member. Some common experiences include:

- Feeling helpless, sighing, noticing changes in your appetite or sleep patterns
- Feeling frustrated with your family member or the tasks of caregiving
- Feeling despair or depression; withdrawing from social activities
- Withdrawing from the person; investing less intense emotional involvement
- Noticing the amputation may impact all aspects of your life
- Acknowledging the importance of caring for the amputee family member
- Appreciating the personal growth involved in adapting to lifestyle changes.

Many caregivers find they are overwhelmed by guilt at times. Common reasons for feeling guilty are:

- Feeling badly that you're still able to things the amputee can no longer do.
- Feeling that something happened in the past that may have caused or contributed to the family member's condition
- Feeling you should have done something different for him/her
- Having negative thoughts about them because of the overwhelming responsibilities involved and time spent, the loss of personal freedom
- Feeling angry with other family members who live far away, criticize, or prefer to remain uninvolved in caregiving.

To help you work through these feelings, you may want to consider these suggestions:

- Confront your feelings and forgive yourself for any negative thoughts. Remember that your feelings are normal for anyone in your situation. By learning to recognize and accept your feelings, you can begin the process of healing.
- Share your feelings with a trusted, sympathetic friend. Turn to someone who is sincere and non-judgmental who will let you express yourself freely. Talk to other family members as well, letting them know what you're going through.

- Seek out other amputee caregivers of those in a similar situation. This will give you an opportunity to express your feelings, share your experiences, receive much needed emotional support, and develop new caregiving skills. Joining an amputee support group may also help combat feelings of isolation and loneliness that can accompany caregiving.

Remember that caring for yourself is as important as caring for your family member. A healthy frame of mind will facilitate the rehabilitation of the amputee and also keep everyone's outlook positive and uplifting.

- Return to some aspects of your daily routine; you'll feel less isolated and out of step with other people
- Bring balance into your life by doing things that bring you joy and comfort. You may want to think of your life as moving along two parallel tracks: one is devoted to caregiving and the other is devoted to caring for yourself. Be sure to schedule time to move from caregiving to the self-care track.
- Give yourself time to rest so that you'll be less vulnerable to physical illnesses that may result from stress. Consider listening to relaxation tapes, soothing music, or trying deep breathing exercises to relieve stress.
- Allow time for physical exercise, play, or spending time in new surroundings. For example, you may want to get in the habit of taking a vigorous half-hour walk.
- Let yourself laugh. Try to find humor even in difficult situations. By recognizing the humor in everyday life and giving yourself the release that comes with laughter, you can re-awaken the joy of living beyond the daily chores of caregiving.
- Take time to dream. Dreaming is a healthy sign of belief in your future. Allowing yourself to visualize what is to come will help you remember that your life is more than this caregiving experience. Through positive imagery, old dreams will be released when new ones are firmly in place.

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