

Depression Stress Busters

~ taken from an article on Beliefnet.com



Caregivers are so vulnerable to depression because they often sacrifice their own needs while tending to their loved one and because of the constant stress involved. Here are 12 tips to guide you toward as you care for a relative

Acknowledge it. If you haven't already, say this out loud: "This sucks." Call a spade a spade. Granted, you don't want to stay stuck in the negative thoughts for too long but suppressing your emotions—forcing that positive spin on each and every thought—can actually do more harm than good.

Educate yourself. You are probably scared. You don't know what's coming down the pike. You detest surprises, and ever since your loved one fell ill, your life has been full of these shockers. There's no way of eliminating all the surprises but if you understand the illness of the person you're nursing, then you can better predict their behavior, and can prepare yourself for what may happen next. You might also consider attending a caregiver training program. Studies show significant improvement in the quality of life of caregivers who received training

Put on your own oxygen mask. "In the event of an emergency, please fasten the oxygen mask over your own face before assisting others." Taking caring of your own needs is really as important as grabbing your oxygen mask first because you'll be running out of breathe early in the inning if you hold off on breathing until everyone is well.

Schedule breaks. That DOES NOT mean that you go about your day and grab whatever free 15 minutes you can get --before the meatloaf is done or the Jell-O is solid – at which time you sit down to read some depressing headlines in the paper, hoping for no interruptions.

That DOES mean scheduling one half-hour every day at the same time of day that you can, guilt-free, put out your "Off Duty" sign, and during that break no one is allowed to bother you with requests. By taking the same half-hour every day, you have a better shot at convincing your ill loved one that you really are serious about needing some time to yourself.

Label the guilt. I'm not going to tell you to get rid of your guilt but label your guilt as helpful or unhelpful, because I bet you think you're supposed to own all of it. The negative intrusive thoughts that tell you that you are a loser for not doing more for your loved one add nothing to the situation.

Get organized. Structure helps. Implement some simple household rules ... because sick people want things all the time, and that can become very wearisome. If an ill loved one knows dinner is at 6 every evening, and that Wednesday is pizza day, they can feel comforted by knowing what is ahead and it gives them less to worry about.

Get out of the house. Don't be a captive inside your home. Sign up for swim clubs and community programs even if you don't want to, because time spent outside of the home with other human beings is as crucial to your mental health as eating the right foods, exercising and getting support.

Taking time to enjoy a pastime. It isn't a selfish act. It will help you be a better caregiver because it will elevate your mood – not to mention assisting you with concentration and patience -- which will in turn help your loved one.

Sleep. When laboratory rats are deprived of sleep for several days at a time, their brains start to malfunction and they become seriously ill. Humans react in much the same way. After just a few nights of sleep deprivation, most people report intense, aching fatigue. After a few more days, they begin to feel physically ill. They also start moving and speaking more slowly. In this sleep-altered state, mood turns despondent, social interest disappears, thoughts turn negative, appetite becomes erratic, and concentration wanes.

Reduce your expectations. Caretakers are constantly grieving. With every errand or task, they are reminded of their loss: of how an illness robbed them of good times with their loved one. And they yearn for that old life back.

Factor in all of this grieving, and it's no wonder why caregivers feel so exhausted and overwhelmed and tired. You must keep the rest of your life simple. You need rest and solitude."

Ask for Help. Get some outside help, preferably free, from other family members who are too busy living their lives to help out, or from paid services, such as homecare, if you have to. Don't wait until you come down with shingles, pneumonia or chronic fatigue. By then you have missed your window of opportunity. Start getting help when you have some energy left, so you can brainstorm inventive ways means of problem solving, or barter for a little assistance. If no one from your family volunteers, inquire from some different homecare assistance programs, such as Meals on Wheels or adult daycare programs. Pay for help if you have to, this is no time to save money. Your life is more important.

