

# COPING WITH STRESS AS A TRANSPLANT CAREGIVER

## STRATEGIES FOR RECOGNISING AND MANAGING STRESS

**This information is for caregivers, who can experience stress and burnout during a patient's transplant journey.**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Whether you become a caregiver over time or overnight, many emotions may surface when you take on the job of caregiving. You might feel these emotions right away or some may not surface until you have been caregiving for awhile.

Whatever your situation, it is important to know that you, too, are important. It is normal to feel overwhelmed at times, as a caregiver, but please get help if you start to feel stressed or worried about the future, for yourself or the person you care for.

## 2 WHO IS A CAREGIVER?

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need, such as an ill spouse or partner, a disabled child, or an aging relative.

**Caregiving can include many different types of activities, such as:**

- Cooking, cleaning, shopping and helping someone with their household needs
- Helping someone with their day-to-day needs, such as dressing and bathing
- Driving or going with someone to health care appointments
- Helping someone who needs you in many other ways

You may not see yourself as a caregiver. But if you are giving care and assistance to someone else, it is important to recognise the caregiving work you do.

## 3 IS FEELING STRESSED NORMAL?

**Yes, this is normal.** This stress is called caregiver stress. Sometimes, caregivers can feel even more stress than the patients. You may be so busy caring for your loved one that you forget to care for yourself.

You may not want to take time away from your loved one to deal with your stress. But feeling too much stress can affect your loved one, too. They may start to see and feel your stress as well. To help your loved one, you need to take care of yourself.

## 4 SIGNS OF CAREGIVER STRESS

**As a caregiver, you may be so focused on the person you are caring for that you don't realise that your own health and well-being are suffering. You may experience one or more of these symptoms. Some feelings and symptoms may include:**

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired often
- Getting too much sleep or not enough sleep
- Gaining or losing weight
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad
- Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems
- Abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications

Too much stress, especially over a long time, can harm your health. As a caregiver, you're more likely to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. You may also not get enough sleep or physical activity, or eat a balanced diet. All of these factors can increase your risk of heart disease and diabetes.

## 5 FIVE TYPES OF CAREGIVER STRESS

You might have one or more of these kinds of caregiver stress:



### 1. Physical

Taking care of a loved one can be tiring. You may not have time to eat well and exercise. This can affect your own health. Helping your loved one move around or move from bed to chair can also be hard on your own body.



### 2. Financial

It can be expensive to provide care to your loved one. Trying to manage all of the costs can cause stress.



### 3. Environmental

You may have gone through many changes to help care for your loved one. How you spend your day or where you live may have changed. These kinds of changes can cause stress.



### 4. Social

You may be spending so much time with your loved one that you don't have time for other family or friends. Not having family and friends around for support can be stressful.



### 5. Emotional

There are different types of caregiver stress that can cause you to feel:

- Helpless
- lonely
- embarrassed
- afraid
- depressed
- self-doubt
- frustrated

Sometimes, you may also start to feel angry or resentful towards the person you are caring for. These feelings are completely normal but they can cause you to feel guilt and stress.

Recognising the kinds of stress you feel can help you make the right kinds of changes. It is ok to feel a lot of stress, or none at all. **Use this space to note down any reasons you may feel stressed:**

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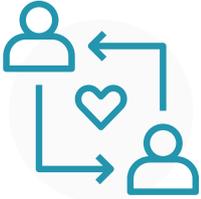
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## 6 REDUCING CAREGIVER STRESS

An important step in tackling stress is to realise when it is a problem for you and make a connection between the physical and emotional signs you are experiencing and the pressures you are faced with.

**Once you have recognised you are experiencing stress, think about a plan to change what you can and get support if needed. Here is a list of some ways you can manage your stress:**



### Accept and ask for help

Are you taking on too much? Are there things you could hand over to someone else? Why not have a list of things others can help you with and let them choose. It may be an offer to help with shopping, a cooked meal, or run an errand. It is important to ask and accept help from friends and family.



### Make lists to help you achieve goals.

You could start to make lists of small tasks that you can do each day to achieve an overall goal. Or establish a daily routine and start saying “no” to requests that are draining and not a priority.



### Build supportive relationships

Find close friends or family who can provide help and practical advice as this can help manage stress. Joining a club, enrolling in a course, or volunteering can all be good ways of expanding your social networks and get you doing something different.

An online support group, of people who have had similar experiences, is a great way to feel connected. Sometimes simply knowing you are not alone can help.



### Healthy Meals

There is growing evidence showing that food can affect our moods and a healthy diet can reduce the risk of diet-related diseases. Feelings of wellbeing can be protected by ensuring our diet provides adequate amounts of nutrients, so try eating at least 3 healthy meals a day and drink lots of water.



### Physical Exercise

Physical exercise can help manage the effects of stress. A simple 15-20 minute walk, three times a week, can provide a natural ‘mood boost.’ Incorporating an exercise routine to suit your lifestyle will be beneficial to your overall wellbeing.



### Mindfulness

Mindfulness meditation can be practiced anywhere at any time. Research has suggested it can be helpful for managing and reducing the effect of stress, anxiety, and other related problems in some people.



### Restful sleep

Sleep problems are common when you're experiencing stress. If you are having difficulty sleeping, try to reduce the amount of caffeine you consume and avoid too much screen time before bed. Why not get into the habit of writing your 'to-do' list before bedtime to help remove worrisome thoughts?



### Financial and work place support

Making time to speak to your employer to let them know you may need to go to more appointments than usual can help reduce your stress and worry. It might also be a good time to find out if your employer has any family caregiver benefits or flexibility, such as a caregiver time-off program.

Finances can be stressful for many caregivers. The Government have information on disability and sickness benefits. Also check your workplace or private insurance plans to see if you can access any special programs or benefits through them.



### Go easy on yourself

It's normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes, but remember that no one is perfect. Trust and believe that you are doing the best you can and making the best decisions you can at any given time. Try to keep things in perspective and don't be too hard on yourself. Look for things in your life that are positive and write down things that make you feel grateful.

If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, a good place to start is your local GP who can connect you with further support. Do not be afraid to seek professional help if you feel that you are no longer able to manage things on your own. Many people feel reluctant to seek help but it is important because it will help you feel better.

## 7 MORE SUPPORT

### 1. Emergency help

If you are in an emergency, or at immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, please contact emergency services on 000.

### 2. Counselling (24/7)

If you need support call one of the following numbers:

#### Lifeline Australia

 13 11 14

#### Kids Helpline

 1800 551 800

#### Suicide Call Back Service

 1300 659 467

#### Beyond Blue

 1300 224 436

#### MensLine Australia

 1300 789 978

**If you don't feel like you can call any of the listed services, you can also:**

- talk to someone you trust
- contact your GP, a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist
- visit a hospital emergency department

### 3. Online resources

#### Black Dog Institute

 [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

#### Beyond Blue

 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### 4. Use this space to list your own support contacts and resources

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Do not use this information for diagnosis or treatment. For further help, contact your care provider or general practitioner for advice about a specific medical condition. They can help organise a mental health plan and other specialist referrals if needed.