



REDUCING STRESS

Fact Sheet

Reducing caregiver stress: finding ways to feel better

Here are some hints for reducing stressful feelings.

Try a number of methods, you may find some help more than others.

LEARN ABOUT THE DISEASE AND GIVING CARE ... THEN PASS IT ON

Being aware as much as you can about ALS and care strategies will prepare you for the ALS journey. Knowing how the disease affects the person will help you to stay close to them and adapt to the changes. Sharing this information with family and friends will help them to know what is happening and better prepare them to provide you with the help and support you need. The ALS Society of Canada has prepared *A Manual for People Living with ALS* which is available through your local ALS Society or at

http://www.als.ca/als_manuals.aspx

BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE DISEASE

You must, even though it is not easy, be realistic about the disease and its effects. ALS is a progressive disease. The person you are caring for will develop more and more

debilitating symptoms over time. Once you accept this reality, it will be easier for you to adjust your expectations.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOURSELF

Caring for someone takes time and energy. There will be limits to what you can do. You will have to decide what is most important to you. What do you value most – time with the person you are caring for, time by yourself, or a tidy house? There is no “right” answer; only you know what matters most to you at any given moment. Besides making choices, you will have to set limits on what you can do in a day. It may be hard to admit you can’t do it all. It is not easy to say no. Be realistic and think carefully about how much you can do by yourself and where you need help.

ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

When caring for someone, you will have many mixed feelings. In just one day, you may feel content, angry, guilty, happy, sad, embarrassed, afraid, and helpless. Although these feelings may be confusing and hard to handle, they are neither good nor bad, but normal. Negative feelings do not mean you

are not a good caregiver; they mean you are human. Know that you are doing the best you can.

SHARE YOUR FEELINGS

You need to share your feelings with others. Find someone with whom you are comfortable, then talk about how you feel or what is troubling you. This person may be a close friend or family member, someone you met at an ALS support group, a member of your faith, community, or a health-care professional. Sharing your feelings, especially with a trained professional, can help you manage them and keep them from undermining your caregiver role.

LOOK FOR GOOD THINGS

Your outlook can really affect the way you feel. Try to look at the good side of things. Look for ways the person can keep exercising their physical and mental skills. Work to make every day count. There will continue to be times that are special and worthwhile.

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TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Your own health is key. Do not ignore it. Eat proper meals and get regular exercise. Find ways to relax and make sure you get the rest you need. Make appointments with your doctor for check-ups. These things will help you deal with stress and allow you to keep giving good care. As well, you need regular breaks so you can carry on interests outside of caregiving. Do not wait until you are too exhausted to plan this. Take time to keep up with things that are important to you. This will give you strength and help prevent you from feeling lonely and isolated.

LOOK FOR HUMOUR

ALS is serious, but you do not have to take yourself seriously all of the time. Seeing humour in situations does not lessen the meaning of your care.

GET HELP

You will need the support that comes from sharing thoughts and feelings with others. Find a way with which you are at ease either one-on-one with a professional or as part of an ALS support group.

Practical Help

It can be hard to ask for and accept help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. You cannot care for a person with ALS alone.

ASK

Ask family and friends for help;

most people are very willing to help. There are programs to provide you help with house hold chores and caregiving tasks. Your local ALS Society can assist in finding services in your community. Figure out what kind of help you need, and let people know.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Planning for the future can help relieve stress. While the person with ALS is able, review his/her financial status and plan as needed. Choices related to future health and personal-care decisions should be discussed, thought about and written down. Also think about an alternate caregiving plan should you be unable to keep on giving care.

LIVING WITH SOMEONE WITH ALS IS CHALLENGING.

We have learned that life can be easier by:

- Knowing the disease and its effects
- Learning more about how to give care
- Taking care of yourself
- Asking for help
- Accepting help
- Being creative, patient, and realistic
- Planning for the future

The ALS Society has information and support programs.

You are not alone.