

## Managing the Stress of Caregiving

No matter what stage in life, families face challenges throughout the life cycle. As a young parent, one is concerned about a baby's diet, sleep habits and healthy. Later in life, possibly a youngsters study habits or a grandchild's future may be an issue of concern. Before you know it, the years have placed you in position of being a caregiver of a spouse or elderly parent. This can be one of the most stressful times in a person's life. In fact, depression, a weakened immune system due to stress, and feelings of guilt are all common experiences of caregivers. Here are several tips to help you manage the stresses related to caregiving:

- **You have the right to take care of yourself**, as this will allow you to take better care of you relative. There are several things you can do to help yourself as a caregiver.
- When needed, **find people who can provide respite care**. Pay close attention and recognize the limits of your skills, time, endurance, and strength. You may want to hire a family member, friend, or aide. Information on how to provide safe, personal care is available in hospitals, nursing homes, and from in-home agency personnel.
- **Find a support group** where you can share your guilt, frustration, anger, or grief – and also share valuable tips.
- **Maintain your own health** by eating relaxed, balanced meals, getting regular exercise, and taking care of your own medical problems promptly.
- **Do only what must be done**. Make a list of priorities and put some things off for when you'll have more time – or just ignore them.

- **Treat yourself.** What once seemed like a luxury (e.g., someone to do your housekeeping once in awhile) can now be considered a sanity-saver.
- **Be creative about finances.** Consider “bartering” a service to a friend or relative in exchange for their help with caregiving. Check on free or inexpensive used medical equipment through churches, service agencies, or senior newspapers.
- **Make time for simple pleasures.** Find someone to take over so you can bake cookies, read, nap, meet a friend for lunch, or take a long bath.
- **Be patient with yourself** and keep your sense of humor. Give yourself credit for doing your best.

For more information regarding caregiving and other family related issues, please contact your local County Extension office or please visit [www.marriagemississippi.com](http://www.marriagemississippi.com).