

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

As a caregiver, you may become overwhelmed with the responsibilities and demands placed on you. The following information came from a study based on caregivers of individuals with memory loss, however, the feelings described below may be felt by a caregiver in any situation. Read through the following stages. Can you relate to what is being described? If so, it is important to access the help that is available. Decide how much you are able to give, and then accept that there are limits to what you or anyone else can do in this situation.

Stage 1 • Caregiver is anxious to provide best care possible for loved one. Maintains the house, garden and car. Attends to family. "Keeps up appearances." Helps person through social situations. Remains optimistic, caring, supportive. Operates as "superwoman/superman." Attends to personal care. Denies problems.

Stage 2 • Caregiver begins to take medications, usually for sleep or headaches. It becomes harder and harder to keep on top of things. Some help from family is still available.

Stage 3 • Emotional and physical resources are drained. Less and less contact with people, doctor/dentist/minister/friends. Caregiver experiences feelings of powerlessness. Caregiving consumes the whole day and night. Outside help dwindles away.

Stage 4 • Stress becomes harder to conceal. Caregiver begins taking tranquilizers. Sleep is continually disturbed. Caregiver becomes irritable. Less and less contact with others is made. There is danger of abuse.

Stage 5 • Caregiver feels unhealthy. Finds it hard to get up in the morning. Never feels rested. May have hypertension/colitis. Symptoms of chronic fatigue. Caregiver loses the will to take care of self. Is unable to manage the household. Rarely socializes with others. Feel helpless, guilty, a failure.

Stage 6 • Chronic state of fatigue. Caregiver is in a state of "unwell-ness." Is unable to ask for help. Becomes isolated. Is unable to access resources for information. Caregiver suffers from burnout. Caregiver burnout is characterized by exhaustion, frustration, and anger.