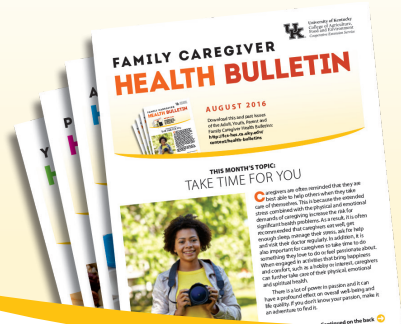


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



JUNE 2019

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: HOW TO MANAGE STRESS



Taking breaks and connecting with others can help manage stress.

Dr. David Danskin from Kansas State University estimates that 85 percent of primary care doctor visits are prompted by stress-related causes. Some caregivers may not recognize signs of stress, while other caregivers ignore what their body is telling them.

The bottom line is that mismanaged and chronic negative stress can be a silent killer that causes harmful physical and emotional effects. It is important to recognize the signs of stress and learn how to manage them properly:

- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Feelings of being constantly pressured, hassled, or hurried
- Irritability
- Moodiness
- Increased likelihood of getting sick or needing more recovery time from an illness

Continued on the back →



Caregivers: it is critical that you take care of yourself first. Stress can put you at greater risk for health problems.

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- Aches and pains (stomachache, headache, chest pain)
- Teeth grinding or jaw clenching
- Allergic reactions (eczema, hives, asthma)
- Problems sleeping
- Increased smoking and/or drinking
- Overeating or undereating
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reduced productivity
- Changes in sexual activity
- Changes in menstrual cycles
- Magnified symptoms of menopause
- Sadness
- Depression

While we cannot rid ourselves completely of stress, caregivers can learn to manage it. The ultimate goal of stress management is to achieve a balanced life, with time for caregiving, relationships, work, relaxation, and even fun — plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet life's demands head on.

Identify the sources of stress in your life

A first step in stress management is to identify the stressors in your life. Are there any stressors you can avoid, reduce exposure to, or eliminate completely? For example, instead of working, making dinner, driving everyone to practice, and then helping your parents to bed, can someone else make dinner or do the carpooling for you?

Learning healthier ways to manage stress

Since everyone has unique responses to stress, there is no “one size fits all” solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation; therefore, it is important to experiment with different stress reduction strategies to lessen your feelings of stress. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

- Set aside time for relaxation
- Connect with others
- Ask for help
- Do one thing you enjoy every day
- Take breaks
- Say no (accept that you cannot do everything!)

- Keep your sense of humor
- Adopt or maintain a healthy lifestyle (eat healthy, exercise, drink water, sleep, go to the doctor)
- Acknowledge your feelings
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Prioritize and organize

Two additional strategies for managing stress include **changing the situation** and **changing your response to the situation**.

You can change a stressful situation by avoiding or altering the stressor. If, for example, making dinner after work for your family is stressing you out because you are tired from working and feel rushed to get to your parent's house to help them to bed, then tell your family you need someone else to make dinner or, if possible, pick up carry-out on the way home.

If it is not possible to change the situation, you may have to learn how to change your reaction to the situation. You can change your reactions by focusing on what is truly important, accepting the stressor or adapting to the stressor, and moving on. Humor can help with this — or singing the tune “Let it Go...” (Think Disney's movie, “Frozen”). If, for example, your mom refuses to take a shower even though Tuesday is always “shower night,” recognize that one missed shower will be okay.

When caring for others, it is critical that you take care of yourself first. If you are exhausted and burned out, you will put yourself at greater risk for health problems, and you will be a less effective caregiver.

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