

CAREGIVER BURNOUT

by Dedra Jize, OT, CSA

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In California, there are over 4 million 'informal' caregivers that provide care for their parents or friends. There are a wide range of responsibilities that caregivers provide. It may be that the older adult wants to remain in their own home and needs occasional assistance, or the caregiving is long distance which can be logistically and emotionally difficult. Perhaps you are providing live-in caregiving.

In whatever capacity you are providing care to another individual, remember to FIRST take care of yourself! "Why?" "How?" The "why" is easy. If you aren't available to care for the person you love, then who will be there for them? Statistically speaking, it is not uncommon for a caregiver to have a chronic health issue (i.e., high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, or obesity) and end up in a hospital or even pass away before the person they are caring for does. It is the caregiver who is under constant stress. Proper nutrition and exercise are often the first things to drop off the list. The human body can only handle so much stress (psychological, physical and emotional) before it breaks.

You may wonder, "but HOW can I take care of myself?!" For some, it may be as 'simple' as having an attitude adjustment. Perhaps guilt drives you, or you consider it selfish to do something for yourself. Perhaps you never learned how to ask for help. Misconceptions as a caregiver can result in poor choices for yourself that further increase your stress.

Another important thing a caregiver can do to reduce stress is to have a solid support group. Even better, have several. The support of family and friends is invaluable. They can give you a physical break from the job or can provide a sounding board for you to share the frustrations of caregiving. A caregiver support group can also be important for your well-being. If you think you don't have the time, there are online support groups that meet at all hours of the day and night. Whether attending a support group in person or online, these groups provide a place to learn about the disease affecting the person you care for, exchange ideas to help cope, and they are a place where you learn you are not alone.

Are you experiencing caregiver "burnout"? Can you identify it if you are? Honestly look at yourself and your current behaviors. How are they different from prior to becoming a caregiver? Are you self-medicating with excessive alcohol or sleeping pills, seeing a change in your eating habits (either increased or decreased), feeling depressed (i.e., hopelessness, low energy, feeling alone or even thoughts of death), having trouble sleeping, and/or having difficulty concentrating (missing appointments)? Any of these can be signs that you are neglecting yourself and need help. Help can be from your physician, family, friends, or support groups.

With the help of others, there are five basic things you can do that will help you be the best at the caregiving you offer:

1. Avoid tobacco completely
2. Avoid excess alcohol
3. Become more physically active
4. Choose good nutrition, having healthy and quick food options available
5. Set aside the time and create an environment to get a good night's sleep

These few items will go a long way in helping you reduce the physical, psychological and emotional stress that you experience as a caregiver. You will feel stronger in all areas that will help you to take responsibility for your own well-being while also caring for another.

I am Dedra Jize, the Geriatric Care Manager at Litherland, Kennedy & Associates, APC, Attorneys at Law, and I'm here to support seniors and their loved ones. I can assess the situation and assist with a plan that works and helps everyone in your family. I advocate for seniors or the frail that are in the hospital, and can also advocate for you, the caregiver, to help you get your needs met while seeing that excellent care is being provided for your loved one. I offer a free 15-minute consultation to determine how I may be able to help you. You can reach me at the office at (408) 356-9200 or (831) 476-2400 or dedra@attorneyoffice.com.

ABOUT LITHERLAND, KENNEDY & ASSOCIATES, APC, ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Litherland, Kennedy & Associates, APC, Attorneys at Law have been providing quality estate planning and elder care services in the Greater Bay Area since 1975. We are members of the American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys, a national membership organization committed to assisting attorneys in providing quality estate planning services to their clients. We are also members of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, a membership organization comprised of attorneys in the private and public sectors who deal with legal issues affecting the elderly and disabled.

Our team of qualified and experienced individuals are trained in the complex areas of estate planning, trusts, probate, Medi-Cal, special needs planning, tax law and geriatric care management. The aim of all members of the law firm is to help you accomplish your estate planning goals and to take the mystery out of the planning process.

Dedra Jize is a Certified Senior Advisor and Geriatric Care Manager. She works to help our senior clients and their families with Medicare issues, and Medi-Cal applications and representations. Dedra provides psycho-social assessments of health care needs, develops individualized plans for care, evaluates the specific needs of clients, and makes recommendations when applicable for home care services, independent living communities, assisted living facilities, and nursing facilities. Her goal in working with clients is to advocate on behalf of the senior, and to enhance the quality of life of both the older adult and his or her family.



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