



FORT GARRY WOMEN'S
RESOURCE CENTRE

Women Caregivers of Aging Parents: Fact Sheet

Who Are The Caregivers?

A caregiver is anyone who provides care and support to someone who is unable to take care of themselves. A large percentage of these caregivers are female relatives or friends who add unpaid caregiving to their many responsibilities. Women caring for their loved ones are strong and courageous individuals who play an important and invaluable role in our society. Most people who require care wish to remain living in their family homes for as long as possible. This can be achieved with the assistance of caregivers.

What Are the Effects of Caregiving on My Emotional Health?

Female caregivers report that they are often isolated. They may feel that nobody understands how strongly their role as caregiver affects their lives. While these women may feel needed, they also struggle emotionally with negative feelings. These can include feelings of:

- Bitterness for being trapped in this role
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Resentment and anger towards the loved one and about the situation
- Guilt for wanting their freedom from the responsibility
- Grief over the loss that is felt

What Can I Do About the Negative Feelings I Have?

Women caregivers need to recognize and accept these feelings. It's O.K. to feel frustrated, resentful, and bitter at times. It's important to recognize the feelings and realize that adding the caregiving job to all of your other responsibilities gives you an enormous load to carry. If you acknowledge the feelings and they are becoming a problem for you, seek out the help of a family member, a trusted friend or a professional if necessary.

What Are the Effects of Caregiving on Physical Health?

Women caregivers are less likely than non-caregivers to practice preventive healthcare and self-care behavior. This is because they spend so much time caring for partners, children, pets, friends, as well as their aging parents. Add to that the numerous volunteer activities, errands, housework, family functions, meetings, etc. and there isn't much time left for self care. As well, women also report:

- Sleep deprivation
- Poor eating habits
- Failure to exercise
- Failure to stay in bed or rest when ill
- Postponement of or failure to make medical appointments for themselves

Because of these factors, women caregivers are also more likely to start coping in unhealthy ways such as using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Also, women caregivers are at higher risk for depression as well.

How Can I Take Care of My Physical Health?

Women who spend time helping and caring for others often neglect their own needs. It's like "running on empty" when we don't take the time to re-fuel. Remember the rules for using the oxygen mask on an airplane? An oxygen mask descends in front of you. What do you do? As we all know, the first rule is to put on your own oxygen mask before you assist anyone else so that you don't pass out while you're trying to assist someone else. Only when we first help ourselves can we effectively help others. Caring for yourself is one of the most important and most often forgotten things you can do as a caregiver. When *your* needs are taken care of, the person you care for will benefit, too.

What Can I Do For My Own Self Care?

Remember, it is not selfish to focus on your own needs and desires when you are a caregiver—it's an important part of the job. You are responsible for your own self care. Try to focus on the following self care practices:

- Learn and use stress-reduction techniques
- Attend to your own health care needs
- Get proper rest and nutrition
- Exercise regularly

- Take time off without feeling guilty
- Participate in pleasant nurturing activities
- Seek and accept the support of others
- Seek supportive counseling when you need to, or talk to a trusted friend
- Identify and acknowledge your feelings

What Can I Do To Prevent Caregiver Burnout?

- Arrange for an evening or afternoon out one or more times a week. Ask a relative or friend to fill in for you.
- If it is difficult to get out, invite people over to talk, knit, have tea, cook, play cards, watch a movie. Do anything you might enjoy that can be done at home.
- Pamper yourself by taking time to relax for a small part of every day. Take a warm bath, read a book, watch a movie.
- If there is someone who can take over as caregiver for a longer period, or if you can afford to hire a respite worker, arrange a weekend or week away occasionally.
- Watch for signs of depression. Take it seriously if you become unduly irritable, cry over minor upsets, feel overwhelmed or helpless, lose your appetite, or cease enjoying life. Seek out someone to talk to—a friend or professional.
- Consider joining a caregiver support group. If there are none in your area, try an online support group.

Where Can I Go For Help?

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre www.fgwrc.ca	477-1123
Age & Opportunity www.ageopportunity.mb.ca	956-6440
Alzheimer Society of Manitoba www.alzheimer.mb.ca	1-800-378-6699
Aurora Family Therapy www.aurora.uwinnipeg.ca	786-9251
Creative Retirement Manitoba www.crm.mb.ca	949-2565
Hospice & Palliative Care Manitoba www.manitobahospice.ca	889-8525

The Family Centre www.familycentre.mb.ca	947-1401
The Manitoba Society of Seniors www.msos.mb.ca	942-3147
North End Women's Centre www.newcinc.org	589-7347
Rupert's Land Caregiver Services www.seniors.cimnet.ca	452-9491
Seniors Information Line	945-6565

Resources (Available at the Winnipeg Public Library or local Bookstores)

Antkowiak, Jennifer. (2009). Take Care Tips. How to Take Care of Yourself While You're Taking Care of Others.

Callaway, Phil. (2008). Family Squeeze: Tales of Hope and Hilarity for a Sandwiched Generation.

Government of Manitoba. (2008). A Guide for the Caregiver.

Grant, Daren R. (2004). Caring For/Caring About: Women. Home Care and Unpaid Care Giving.

Government of Manitoba. (2008). Manitoba Seniors Guide.

Jacobs, Barry. (2006). The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers. Looking After Yourself and Your Family While Helping An Aging Parent.

Louden, Jennifer. (1992). The Women's Comfort Book.

Mayo, Mary Ann. (2003). Twilight Travels With Mother: How I Found Strength, Hope, and a Sense of Humor Living with Alzheimer's.

Quan, Kathy. (2009). The Everything Guide to Caring for Aging Parents.

Rhodes, Linda. (2005). Should Mom Be Left Alone? Should Dad Be Driving? : Your Q & A Companion for Caregiving.

Schaef, Anne. (2004). Daily Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much.

Internet Resources

The Canadian Women's Health Network
www.cwhn.ca/resources/faq/selfCare.html

Caregiver Connect. (Victoria Order of Nurses)
Community resources, caregiver health information, caregiver discussion forums
www.caregiver-connect.ca

Canadian Legal Education Association . (Information & educational resources on justice & legal issues)
www.communitylegal.mb.ca

How to Care-Elder Care Survival Guide (Info, support groups and self care info)
www.howtocare.com

Manitoba Caregiver Network (Provides services supporting caregivers of elderly persons in their own home in Winnipeg)
www.olderadultabuse.mb.ca/family-caregivers.cfm

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