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Tips for Managing Stress as a Spousal Caregiver

As seniors age, the likelihood they will need some form of care increases. When someone we love needs a little extra care, we oftentimes step into the caregiver role. Many caregivers face the risks of caregiver burnout, stress and exhaustion; however, when the person you care for is your spouse, the risks may become higher. Why is this? Many spouses who serve as caregivers take “in sickness and in health” very deeply to heart, and this can lead them to hold themselves to high standards. Many spousal caregivers feel guilty if they do not go above and beyond the typical call of care. This can lead them to rest less than other caregivers and put off taking time for themselves so they can fulfill the duty of their vows.

It's a sad reality that many seniors and their loved ones face. In fact, according to a [survey](#) produced by the AARP Public Policy Institute and the United Hospital Fund, they found this reality is much closer to home than many people think. According to the study, one in five family caregivers is actually a spouse, and not surprisingly, spouses are more likely to take on more tasks with less support from family and friends. In order to protect the well-being of spousal caregivers and those in their care, the article states that it's important to reduce isolation and stress, and provide training and support.

How can I reduce the risks of stress in spousal caregivers?

According to an article by [AARP](#) about spousal caregiving, those who care for their loved one full-time are more prone to becoming socially isolated and depressed as time goes on. If nothing is done to prevent physical and mental exhaustion, health issues could abound. Many spousal caregivers aren't exactly sure where to start to reduce the negative effects of being a full-time caregiver to their spouse. Fortunately, AARP provides some ideas that make good starting points.

- **Know when to be a caregiver and when to be a spouse.** One of the biggest mistakes people make in being a spousal caregiver is not separating their roles from each other. Even though you are a caregiver, you are still a spouse and vice-versa. Take time to simply be a couple and talk, enjoy activities you both used to love if you are able, and spend time outside of caregiving.

Not every interaction has to include talking about medical issues. AARP states that it can help to set aside hours during the day to talk about everything but medical issues. After this time period is over, it's ok to talk about medications and care needs your loved one has.

- **Ask for help when you need it.** Too many caregivers think they can handle all of the tasks on their own. While we like to think it's true, believing you can do everything with no help or assistance puts unneeded pressure on yourself. It's important to know when you may need help, and it's especially important to know when you need a break.

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As hard as it may be, caregivers should ask friends and family for help. Ask family if they would be willing to come keep you both company for awhile or see if they would be willing to pick up some prescriptions or groceries, just to take some tasks off your list. If need be, consider joining a support group to connect with others in your position. This can help provide you with valuable advice and social opportunities.

- **Don't be afraid to ask your spouse for things you need.** It can be easy for your spouse to get wrapped up in his or her everyday needs. If you need them to listen to your concerns and feelings, or need their all-in attention, do not be afraid to ask.

Spousal caregivers can also often feel unappreciated. If this is the case for you, tell your loved one. The article on AARP states that talking about your feelings with your loved one can help them to be a better partner and can help strengthen your relationship even through this difficulty.

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