

LIVE WELL! it's essential for your potential

Taking Care of Yourself When You are a Caretaker - It's Essential for Your Potential

Are you a member of the "sandwich" generation? You are if you are caring for young children as well as one or more aging parents. According to a Pew Research Center survey, one out of every 8 Americans ages 40 to 60 is raising a child and caring for a parent at home. And, nearly two-thirds of primary caregivers are women; an AARP study shows. In addition to being a primary caregiver, most of these individuals are also either working full or part-time. Taking care of children, performing on the job and keeping up with the household chores are just some of life's daily stresses. When you also take care of an aging parent or relative, you can feel stretched beyond your limits.

Here are some tips to help you cope:

- **Be organized.** Make a list of things that need to be done, and set realistic priorities and goals. Have a backup plan in place.
- **Stay healthy.** Get enough sleep, eat a healthful diet and exercise regularly. Most people tend to overlook their own health when taking care of others.
- **Make a little time to do things you enjoy.** Relax with family and friends. Having fun, laughing and focusing on things other than your own problems helps you keep your emotional balance and makes you a much better caregiver.
- **Ask for help when you need it.** There will be times when you can't do everything that needs to be done, so call on friends and family members for help with different tasks.
- **Use community resources,** such as adult day services, meal or shopping services, and caregiver support groups to help lighten your load. Also look to see what programs are offered through your place of worship.
- **Feel stressed, angry or depressed?** Step away from the situation for a while. Leave the room for a minute or take a walk around the block.
- **Do not drink excessively or use drugs to cope with stress.** If the feelings continue, talk to a trusted friend, relative, clergy or health professional. Ask your employer if there is an employee assistance program you can use.
- **Talk to your supervisor** at work about your Caregiving responsibilities, so he or she knows what difficulties you may experience. Offer to make up any work time you take off for caregiving.
- **Find out your company's policy on caregivers.** It may offer benefits or services that can help. Take advantage of flex-time policies at work. Consider working part time or job sharing.
- **Ask your human resources department for information on the Family and Medical Leave Act.** This allows up to 12 weeks a year unpaid leave for family caregivers who meet certain requirements.
- **Always thank your coworkers, friends and family for their help and consideration.** Offer to help them with heavy family responsibilities.

There are also other healthy steps you can take to stay well when you're stressed, like connecting to people close to you, getting enough sleep or being physically active. Visit www.LiveYourLifeWell.org to learn more about the 10 Tools to Live Your Life.

If you feel overwhelmed, unable to cope and feel as though your stress is affecting how you function every day, it could be something more, like depression or anxiety. Don't let it go unchecked. Contact your health care provider.

For more information or referrals to local services, visit our online Frequently Asked Questions section at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/faqs, contact Mental Health America or your local Mental Health America affiliate.

