



Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue, sometimes called empathy overload, occurs when caregivers take on the suffering of those they care for.¹

A caregiver is anyone who provides care or support to a person with limitations due to an illness, injury, or disability. This may include caring for a child with special needs, a neighbor who just had surgery, or an aging family member.

Caregivers have a tendency to put the needs of others ahead of their own, and take on a wide variety of roles, such as preparing meals, managing medications, assisting with bathing, handling finances, and much more.

The demands of caregiving can become overwhelming without proper self-care and support, which can leave caregivers feeling drained and unable to provide care for themselves or others.

Left unaddressed, compassion fatigue can lead to caregiver burnout, a condition characterized by mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion.³ It has been estimated that more than 60% of caregivers experience burnout, which is why it is important to learn how to recognize the signs.

If you are a caregiver, here are some signs that it might be time to ask for help:²

- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling emotionally exhausted
- feeling numb or emotionally detached
- delaying your own healthcare appointments or treatments

- neglecting self-care
- loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- feeling anxious or on edge
- increasing conflicts in personal relationships
- changes in appetite or weight
- physical symptoms like headaches, nausea, or dizziness
- difficulty sleeping
- feeling like you have nothing left to give

Sometimes caregivers aren't able to recognize when they need help. If you are concerned about the wellbeing of a caregiver, here are some warning signs to watch for:²

- increased anxiety, sadness, or anger
- difficulty making decisions
- frequently being argumentative
- emotional outbursts
- withdrawal or self-isolation
- increased use of substances to self-medicate

If you feel overwhelmed, have suicidal thoughts, or worry that you may hurt someone you are caring for, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the U.S., or dial 1-833-456-4566 in Canada.^{3,4} You will be immediately connected with someone who can help you find support.

Reaching out to ask for help shows strength, resilience, and a keen self-awareness.

1. American Psychological Association (APA). Are you experiencing compassion fatigue? Updated Jul 11, 2022. Accessed Aug 30, 2023.

2. Canadian Medical Association. Compassion fatigue: Signs, symptoms, and how to cope. Published Dec 8, 2020. Accessed Aug 30, 2023.

3. Cleveland Clinic. Caregiver Burnout. Last reviewed Aug 16, 2023. Accessed Sept 1, 2023.

4. Government of Canada. Mental health support: Get help. Accessed Aug 28, 2023.



Self-Care Tips for Caregivers

Caregivers frequently experience high rates of burnout, which is why regular self-care is essential. Self-care helps ensure you are healthy enough to continue offering support to loved ones.

If you are overwhelmed and not sure where to begin, focus on these self-care areas first: getting enough high-quality sleep, eating nourishing foods, being physically active, finding time to relax and socialize, and knowing when to reach out for help.¹ Aim for at least one act of self-care each day to avoid burnout.

Here are some simple self-care strategies to cope with the stress associated with caregiving:^{1,3}

- 1. Build a strong support system:** Join a support group, community organization, or network geared toward supporting caregivers. Not having a strong support system can make you more vulnerable to burnout and compassion fatigue.
- 2. Practice deep breathing exercises:** Deep breathing can help reduce anxiety and blood pressure. In stressful moments, take a moment to do some deep breathing before responding.
- 3. Be physically active:** Physical activity triggers the release of endorphins that can help relieve stress and tension. Take periodic breaks from caregiving and recharge your emotional batteries.

- 4. Create a daily self-care routine:** Select a personal playlist of self-care activities that you do on a regular basis. Creating a self-care routine makes it less likely that you'll forget.
- 5. Get good sleep:** Make it a priority to get good quality sleep. Your body needs rest to recover from the physical, mental, and emotional stress of caregiving.
- 6. Reach out for support:** Learn how to recognize signs of caregiver burnout and know when to reach out for support. Keep a running list of what you need help with and let friends and family choose how they can help.²

Self-care looks different for everyone. You may need to experiment with several different strategies before you find ones that work well for you. Your health matters too.

Self-care helps ensure you are healthy enough to continue offering support to loved ones.

1. Family Caregiver Alliance. [A Guide to Taking Care of Yourself](#). Accessed Aug 28, 2023.
2. Mayo Clinic. [Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself](#). Published Aug 09, 2023. Accessed Aug 31, 2023.
3. Cleveland Clinic. [Self-Care Tips for Caregivers: Your Health Matters, Too](#). Published Feb 24, 2023. Accessed Sept 5, 2023.



Support Guide for Caregivers

Asking for help can be difficult, especially if you're used to managing everything on your own. However, not asking for support when you need it can lead to compassion fatigue and caregiver burnout.

Reaching out for assistance not only helps you, but it also benefits the people you care for. If you need support, don't hesitate to reach out. Local community organizations and caregiver support groups can also connect you with a wide range of support services.

If you or someone you know is struggling as a caregiver, here are some helpful resources:

Organization	Services	Location	Contact
Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence	Offers programs and supportive resources for caregivers and providers	Canada	canadiancaregiving.org
Caring Bridge	Makes it simple and safe to offer or ask for support when it's needed most	US	caringbridge.org
Caregiver Action Network	Provides education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers free of charge	US	caregiveractionnetwork.org
Family Caregiver Alliance	Provides services to family caregivers of adults with physical and cognitive impairments (assessment, care planning, direct care skills, wellness programs, respite services, and legal/financial consultation vouchers)	US	caregiver.org
Caregiver Exchange	Offers resources for caregivers and provides access to information about services and articles related to caregiving	Canada	caregiverexchange.ca
A Place for Mom	Simplifies the process of finding senior living and home care with personalized guidance at no cost to families	US and Canada	aplaceformom.com
Eldercare Locator	Connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources	US	eldercare.acl.gov
National Adult Day Services Association	Helps caregivers locate adult day care services	US	nadsa.org
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline	Connects caregivers with a mental health professional	Canada	1-833-456-4566
988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline <i>formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline</i>	Connects caregivers with a mental health professional	US	call or text "988"

Contact your Human Resources department to see if your company offers an Employee Assistance Program with representatives and resources to support your caregiving needs.

CABBAGE ROLL CASSEROLE

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons (25 mL) canola oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound (500 g) extra lean ground sirloin
- 1/4 teaspoon (1 mL) salt
- 1/4 teaspoon (1 mL) ground black pepper
- 2 cups (500 mL) chopped cabbage
- 1 can (796 mL/28 oz) diced tomatoes
- 3/4 cup (175 mL) long grain brown rice
- 1 cup (250 mL) sodium-reduced vegetable or beef broth

Instructions

Step 1

In large skillet with lid, heat canola oil over medium. Sauté onions and garlic about 5 minutes.

Step 2

Add ground beef. Brown about 5 minutes over medium-high heat. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Step 3

Add cabbage, tomatoes, rice and broth and stir well. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low simmer, cover and cook for 30 minutes or until rice is tender. If preferred instead, after bringing mixture to a boil, bake in oven-proof skillet with lid in 180 °C (350 °F) oven for about 40 minutes.

Prep Time

5 minutes

Cook Time

40 minutes

Serving Size

1 cup



Nutrition Facts

Calories	200
Total Fat	6g
Sodium	140mg
Carbohydrate	22g
Protein	14g



Schedule Some “Me Time”

Carve out time on your calendar and choose at least one self-care activity to do this week.

Employer Completion Form

☐

I, _____, successfully completed the Me Time
Wellbeing Activity by:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Self-care activities:

Take a Walk

Go for a 20-minute walk to start your day.

Aromatherapy

Sprinkle essential oils on your pillow before bed.

Relax

Do some deep breathing exercises in the middle of the day.

Rest

Go to bed an hour early.

Your Wellbeing Activity

Schedule some “me time”

Carve out time on your calendar and choose at least one self-care activity to do this week