


COPING WITH CAREGIVER STRESS

I WORRY ALL THE TIME

- If being around your loved one is difficult, make a point of spending time alone
 - Arrange for someone else to sit with your loved one while you take an hour for yourself, or take your loved one to visit with a trusted friend or family member
- If being out of touch with your loved one is difficult
 - Make a list of the things you *can* and *cannot* control when your loved one is away and turn your attention to what is possible
- Approach your day in small increments of time
 - Live and plan within the 24-hour day
 - It may be helpful to repeat to yourself, "I live in the 24."



Making a list and organizing it on paper can often reduce anxiety.

GENERAL FEELING OF ANXIETY

- A commitment to daily exercise or mindfulness exercise or meditation will reduce the severity of anxiety
- Notice negative thoughts and replace them with positive affirmations
 - "I am afraid my loved one will get sick again" could become "If my loved one has a relapse, I know what to do and I have people who will help me."
- Make a complete list of your anxious thoughts and generate a positive affirmation for each one (use the above example as a guide)
 - When you start feel anxious, refer to your list and find a coping strategy

MEDICAL TERMS CONFUSE ME


- You need to understand what your role is as the family caregiver, so keep asking for clarification if you do not understand what is being asked of you
- Ask the health providers to use plain language when they discuss taking care of your loved one
- Take your questions to a nurse/social worker/department manager where your loved one is receiving care

PANIC ATTACK RIGHT NOW

- Sit down and breathe deeply
- Since mental calmness is a natural result of physical calmness, sit in a comfortable chair and perform a muscle relaxation exercise. Begin by relaxing you lower extremities and finish by relaxing the face, abdomen and chest.
- Do something physical with your body to interrupt the symptoms
 - Walk, run, swim, exercise

I CANNOT SLEEP

- Lack of sleep is going to make things worse; you have to get on top of this
- Search trusted websites for links to free online resources
 - Try listening to "binaural beats" music at bedtime (head phones with stereo sound are required)
 - Progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness exercises, and guided meditation are often beneficial at bedtime
- Feeling rested has been proven to combat anxiety, and feeling less anxious leads to sounder sleep
 - You may need medical help with your sleep



With time, you will become more resilient by taking care of yourself.

I STILL HAVE TO WORK

- Talk to your supervisor at work to explore how your employer can help you balance your work commitments with your family caregiver duties

TIME TO TALK? If none of these ideas seem workable, it may be time to reach out and talk with a family peer support worker who will understand what you are feeling. Family peer support has been shown to help caregivers feel less isolated gain new hope.

ADDITIONAL READING: *Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A Guide for Caregivers of Persons Living with Mental Illness or Experiencing Mental Health Challenges*, available online at www.ottawapublichealth.ca.