



Caregiver Tip of the Month – May 2010

Notes from Area Agency on Aging of North Idaho

Recognizing and Avoiding Caregiver “burn out”.

“I can’t take it anymore!” When 24/7 caregiving responsibilities sap emotional, physical and mental energy, it means that your resiliency is compromised and you are headed for “burnout”.

Common warning signs of caregiver burnout:

- Constantly exhausted, even after sleeping; neglecting your own needs, because you’re too busy or you don’t care anymore; life revolves around caregiving; you are increasingly impatient and irritable. You feel overwhelmed, helpless, and hopeless.

Tips for taking care of yourself:

- Listen to music, work in the garden, engage in a hobby...whatever it is that you enjoy.
- Take a warm bath and light candles. Get a manicure or a massage. Pamper yourself.
- Eat balanced meals. Exercise even if it's a short walk everyday. Sleep 7 hours a night.
- Read a light-hearted book or rent a comedy. Find some humor in everyday situations. Laughter really is the best medicine.
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings to provide perspective and to serve as a release for your emotions.
- Arrange a telephone contact to call each day. They can also contact others with status updates or to let them know if you need anything.
- Set a time for afternoons or evenings out of the home or invite friends over.

Caregivers often feel isolated as they take on more responsibility, and as their social lives move into the background. The demands of caregiving are sometimes difficult to balance with the caregiver’s life. Caring for someone who gets sick and physically disabled is very difficult. Mobility problems and medication management may also be stressful and draining. Caring for someone with Alzheimer’s or other dementia, or age related memory loss is deceptively stressful and draining. While they may look perfectly normal, communication problems and behavior problems may accompany memory problems especially as the disease progresses.

- Learn as much as you can about the medical condition; create an organized, scheduled, calm environment. Organize a support system. Then keep an open mind and remember that it is the disease or condition that is frustrating, not the person you are caring for. Then take care of yourself!

Respite programs and caregiver support groups can help. Contact Betsy Bullard, Area Agency on Aging, at 667-3179, ext. 222, or email infoassist@aaani.org to find out more about these options and other resources. For expanded caregiver tips go to our website at www.aaani.org and click on Family Caregiving on the left hand side of the home page.