



## 7 Steps to Prevent Caregiver Depression

19 Aug 2019 By : Deb Hipp

### The Symptoms of Caregiver Depression

The first time Iris Waichler realized something was off with her father, Melvin, was the day she accompanied him to a routine doctor's appointment when he was 90 years old. When he removed his shirt for the examination, Waichler and the doctor were shocked to see his wristwatch pushed to his elbow.

"I've been looking for that watch for three weeks," her dad told them. A hospital MRI revealed that Melvin, who had an apartment near Waichler in Chicago, needed surgery for a cerebral hemorrhage. Afterward, Melvin's memory faltered often and he walked with a slower gait.

Eventually, Melvin moved to a skilled nursing residence, and Waichler had to rush frequently to the hospital for late-night emergencies. "My life became one of crisis mode," says Waichler, a medical social worker and author of "Role Reversal: How to Take Care of Yourself and Your Aging Parents."

**If you're a caregiver for an aging parent or spouse, you probably know those feelings well. Isolation, lack of emotional and physical support, and experiencing multiple losses can add up to feelings of depression, says Zina Paris, director of clinical services at [Alzheimer's Los Angeles](#), a nonprofit organization in [Los Angeles](#) offering counseling and other resources for those affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.**

**A caregiver spouse may also be grieving the loss of the couple's personal relationship due to dementia, along with previous plans for their retirement years. "Loss can also extend to things in the caregiver's own life due to caregiving such as activities, hobbies, or travel that person once enjoyed," says Paris.**

[According to the ADAA](#), symptoms of caregiver depression include:

- Anticipatory anxiety about future treatments for your loved one
- Anxiety attacks about not properly following a loved one's medical regimen
- Avoiding meaningful activities because you feel guilty about taking time off from caregiving
- Chronic irritability
- Exhaustion and severe tiredness
- Feelings of tension
- Inability to concentrate or remember details
- Inability to enjoy activities you once found pleasurable
- Inability to sleep
- Inability to talk to others about your experience as a caregiver
- Repetitive nightmares or thoughts about a loved one, including their diagnosis, treatments, etc.
- Suicidal thoughts because you feel inadequate, overwhelmed, or worthless

**Caregivers frequently don't get enough sleep or have time to maintain a healthy diet, says Paris.** Family caregivers can also become so focused on the person who needs care that they neglect their own doctor's appointments.

### 7 Steps to Take to Prevent Caregiver Depression

Caregiver support groups can help ease caregiver stress, but caregivers can also take proactive measures to minimize the risk of depression.

You can use the following seven tips to prevent caregiver depression:

1. Get some exercise.
2. Have realistic expectations of yourself.
3. Have respite in place.
4. Have someone you can talk to.
5. Know what your loved one wants.
6. Pay attention to your body.
7. Stay on top of your own health.