

Tips for caregivers during COVID-19

Why is caregiving so important right now?

One in four Canadians is a caregiver, providing unpaid care to someone who needs help due to a physical or cognitive condition, an injury or a chronic and life-limiting illness.

Caregiving is a challenging role at the best of times. COVID-19 has added to the strain as you try to balance caregiving and the demands of the pandemic. It's more important than ever to develop good habits and strategies to maintain your health and well-being and avoid burnout.

What is caregiver burnout?

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, mental or emotional exhaustion. It can happen at any time, in any caregiver relationship, but the risk increases in times of stress, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This checklist help you identify how stress is affecting your life.

Caregiver stress checklist	Never	Sometimes	Often
Sleep <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do you have a hard time getting to sleep?Do you wake up in the night?Do you have stressful dreams?			
Personal health <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do you unintentionally gained or lost weight recently?Do you get sick more often than you used to?Have you developed chronic health problems such as backaches, headaches or high blood pressure?			
Emotional health <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do minor upsets make you cry or feel angry or unusually irritated?Do you have difficulty controlling your temper?Do you feel pressure to hold things together?Do you feel hopeless about your situation?			
Loss of interests <ul style="list-style-type: none">Have you given up hobbies or interests that you once enjoyed?Do you spend less time with others?			

If you answered "sometimes" or "often" to many of these questions, you might need to seek support.

How to prevent or reduce caregiver burnout

Caregiving can quickly become overwhelming and unsustainable. That's why it is so important for you to own your well-being, and practice self-care. When you feel good in mind, body and spirit, you are a better caregiver. Caring for yourself isn't selfish. The person you are caring for needs you to be healthy. And self-care doesn't need to be a burden. Just a few minutes a day can make a big difference. Here are some ways to take care of yourself:

Find support

- Stay connected to and spend time with family, friends and neighbours.
- Ask for and accept help.
- Don't keep problems to yourself. Seek support from family members, friends, other caregivers or a counsellor or therapist.
- Use community resources that support caregivers. See below for a list of organizations that can help.

Nurture your mental well-being

- Try mindfulness exercises such as meditation or creative visualization.
- Practice relaxation techniques, starting with deep breathing.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Plan little things to look forward to. It may be watching a movie, ordering takeout, reading a good book, getting something new to wear or going for a walk.

Develop Healthy Habits

- Nourish your body with healthy foods. Can't make it to the store? Get your groceries delivered or ask friends, family or neighbours to pick them up for you.
- Get regular exercise. It could be a walk, bike ride, yoga or anything else that gets you moving.
- Establish a daily routine and develop a calming ritual to help you unwind at the end of the day.

Have hobbies and recreation

- Use spare moments to listen to your favourite music, radio show or podcast.
- Do things that bring you inner peace, such as taking a walk, gardening, listening to music, writing in your journal or reading.

Stay positive and realistic

- Accept what you can't change and focus on what you can influence.
- Use positive self-talk and phrases such as "I can," and "I choose."
- Focus on the good things in your life. Practice living in the moment and enjoying life's simpler pleasures.
- Be flexible about plans and expectations. Take things one day at a time.

- Set priorities. Don't waste time or energy on unimportant things.
- Simplify necessary tasks and let go of perfectionism.

Key strategies for caregivers during COVID-19

Stay informed and know your limits

Keep up to date on COVID-19 through credible sources, but limit how much news you take in. Too much media can hurt your mental health. The provincial and federal governments are both credible sources of information:

- [Government of New Brunswick](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)

Know the signs and risk factors

Get familiar with COVID-19 symptoms so you can identify them if you or your loved one gets sick. Certain groups of people, such as older adults and people with chronic diseases, are at a higher risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19. Many caregivers have health issues, so don't put yourself in unnecessary danger. The government websites have clear, current directives on social distancing, masks and other measures to keep yourself and others safe.

Be prepared

Having a plan in case you or your loved one gets sick can help reduce worry:

- Make a list of important phone numbers and post it somewhere prominent. Include your local public health unit, your healthcare provider, close family and friends and other contacts.
- Ensure that you have enough household supplies and medications for two weeks.
- Ask family members, friends or neighbours to help if you're unable to provide care due to illness or quarantine.
- Have a back-up plan if you become ill. Write down detailed instructions on how to provide care. List the medications the person is taking and how often they need to take them.
- Prepare for a possible quarantine. If your loved one has been exposed to COVID-19, has symptoms or has tested positive for the virus, you will need to manage a 14-day quarantine. Can your loved one stay in a specific room, away from other household members? They should also use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Pack a bag with essentials in case you need to go to the hospital. Include a set of clothes, personal care items, emergency contact information, important medical information such as a medication list, and the person's advanced care wishes.

Resources for caregivers

Websites, apps and print resources

- [Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#): Centre for Addiction and Mental Health website
- [Living with Worry and Anxiety Amidst Global Uncertainty](#): Psychology Tools downloadable PDF
- [Canadian Mental Health Association of New Brunswick](#): Free webinars and resources for coping with COVID-19
- [Calm](#): Award-winning app for sleep, meditation and relaxation has some free resources
- [Caregiver Webinar Series](#) from the Family Caregiver Alliance
- [Coping with Stress During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#): World Health Organization tip sheet
- [Calming the person with dementia, and yourself: A video](#) from Dementia U.K.
- [Virtual Visits Toolkit](#): Guides to using Skype, Zoom and FaceTime from TechCoaches
- [Seniors' Guide to Services and Programs](#): Government of New Brunswick website
- [Caregivers' Guide](#): Government of New Brunswick downloadable PDF
- [Wellness Together Canada](#): Tools and resources, including modules for addressing low mood, worry, substance use, social isolation and relationship issues
- [Huddol](#): Free online Canadian forum for caregivers to get support, network, share stories and connect to experts. Huddol has specific members groups, including Alzheimer's and related dementia and cancer support.
- [Managing Through Covid-19: Caregiver tips](#) from the Alzheimer Society of Canada

Community programs

- [Hope for Wellness](#): Immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention for Canadian Indigenous people
- [Mindfulness in New Brunswick](#): Free, bilingual website with resources to teach New Brunswickers about mindfulness in action.
- [Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick](#): Information and guidance on support for all caregivers, whether the person you are caring for has dementia or not.
- [CHIMO Helpline](#), 1-800-667-5005: A provincial, 24/7 crisis phone line for New Brunswickers.
- [Ability New Brunswick](#): Programs to empower the independence and full community participation of New Brunswickers who have a mobility disability. Call 1-866-462-9555 or email info@abilitynb.ca.
- [Red Cross](#), 1-833-729-0144: Friendly calls if you feel lonely and isolated

Government programs

- Department of Social Development contact 1-833-733-7835: Information on home support, respite or residential care, or senior's health and well-being programs.
- [Community Addictions and Mental Health Centres](#): Government of New Brunswick website with a list of resources and contacts.
- [SocialSupportsNB](#): A user-friendly website with information on social programs in New Brunswick. The site currently focuses on seniors.

- 211: A free, bilingual, confidential phone line to help New Brunswickers navigate community, social, non-clinical health and government services for everyday needs and times of crisis.