



Care for the Military Caregiver

Although taking care of an injured or ill service member can be enriching and fulfilling, it can also be emotionally and physically challenging. Encouraging caregivers in your practice to take care of themselves, communicate openly with their loved ones, and make use of resources can help alleviate the stress of caregiving.

What caregivers may face

Though their situations and duties may differ, caregivers commonly experience the following realities:

- The hardships of caregiving can, at times, produce negative emotions such as guilt, depression, and anger.
- Sometimes caregivers are so deeply concerned about the well-being of the person for whom they are caring, they forget their own needs.

Caregiving may be putting too much stress on caregivers if they have any of the following symptoms:

- Feeling overwhelmed or exhausted
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing significant weight
- Frequent headaches, bodily pain, or other physical problems
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs

What caregivers can do

Some steps caregivers can take to deal with stress and maintain health include:

- Seek out the support they need from family, friends, or support groups. Their local installations may have information on groups in their area. They can also join other military caregivers in [online forums](#) and [Peer 2 Peer forums](#) sponsored by the Department of Defense.
- Decrease expectations of themselves: taking one day at a time, not feeling guilty, and knowing that it's OK if they can't do everything.
- Use humor and maintain a positive attitude.
- Increase others' involvement by enlisting the help of friends and family, hiring someone to clean the house, or asking grandparents to watch the kids occasionally.
- Eat right, exercise regularly, and get adequate rest.
- Avoid drinking alcohol as a way to cope with the stress of caregiving.
- Take time to relax with hobbies, sports, books, music, a soothing bath, etc.
- Maintain a social life—friends are not only a source of support, but also a source of stress-busting fun.
- Find a retreat specifically for military caregivers or families of wounded warriors.
- Consider using respite care.

Remind caregivers that they probably can't do everything that they'd like to in a day, a week, etc. Encourage them to figure out what's most important to them and what they must do immediately. Put off things that can wait. Consider writing two lists: things that must be done immediately and things that can wait. Focus only on the list of priorities and let the other items go for now.

Resources for caregivers

Caregivers in your care are in the right place, talking to a professional who can help them manage stress. A few additional resources that provide support to caregivers are:

- [Wounded Warrior Project](#)
- [Department of Defense Caregiver Resource Directory](#)
- [National Military Family Association](#)
- [Operation Homefront's Hearts of Valor](#)
- [Operation Family Caregiver](#)
- [Military OneSource](#)

If you are interested in providing non-medical counseling to military service members and their families through Military OneSource, please email us at:
mosproviderrelations@militaryonesource.com.