

SOME EFFECTS OF STRESS

Potential Physical Effects of Stress

When a person is under stress, the body releases the primary stress hormone called cortisol. Cortisol is very important, because it organizes systems throughout the body (including the heart, lungs and immune system) to manage the stressful event. When a stressor continues for a long time, it can take a serious toll on the body's ability to function and may lead to many health problems. Since caregiving can be a long-term stressor, caregivers can be at risk for conditions such as:

- High blood pressure
- Heart problems
- Increased susceptibility to colds and flu

Potential Psychological Effects of Stress

When left untreated, chronic or long-term stress can cause problems such as depression, anxiety, anger, and irritability. Some people feel that they do not have the energy to do routine tasks and wish they were somewhere else. Some people start to feel hopeless and helpless, cry often, and notice changes in their appetite or sleep patterns. They may feel exhausted and empty.

Stress can take away from quality of life by lowering a person's ability to experience pleasure and a sense of accomplishment.

Potential Social Effects of Stress

Caregiver's friendships and relationships often suffer due to the challenges of caregiving. Forming and maintaining friendly support can relieve stress by giving people a chance to discuss their thoughts and feelings. It is common for caregivers to feel that no one understands what they are going through.

However, caring for someone with memory problems does not have to be a lonely experience. As the behaviors and care needs change in the person with dementia, let friends and family members know when help is needed, or maybe just a break. Caring for a loved one with dementia is too big a job for one person.

Visiting local support groups can give you a chance to meet others who have similar experiences. Caregiver stress can lead to illness or burnout if you do not take steps to prevent it.