



ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA

# REDUCING STRESS

SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SLA

A SERIES FOR CAREGIVERS & FRIENDS • 4 OF 4

## Reducing caregiver stress: finding ways to feel better

The following are some suggestions that might relieve some stress.  
Try different methods – you may find other ways that help you more.

### LEARN ABOUT THE DISEASE AND GIVING CARE... THEN PASS IT ON

Knowing as much as you can about ALS and care strategies will prepare you for the ALS journey. Understanding how the disease affects the individual will help you to stay connected to the person and adapt to the changes. Sharing this information with family and friends will enable them to understand what is happening and better prepare them to provide you with the help and support you need. The ALS Society of Canada has prepared *A Manual for People Living with ALS* which is available through your local ALS Society or at <http://www.als.ca>

### BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE DISEASE

It is important, though difficult, to be realistic about the disease and its effects. ALS is a progressive disease: the person you are caring for will exhibit more and more debilitating symptoms. Once you are realistic, it will be easier for you to adjust your expectations.

### BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOURSELF

It is important to realize that caring for someone takes time and energy. There will be limits to what you can do. You will have to decide what is most important to you. What do you value most? – time with the person you are caring for, time by yourself, or a tidy house? There is no “right” answer, only you know what matters most to you at any particular moment.

Besides making choices, you will have to set limits on what you can do in a day. It may be difficult to admit you can't do everything. It is not easy to say no. Be realistic and think carefully about how much you can do and where you need help.

### ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

When caring for someone, you will have many mixed feelings. In just one day, you may feel contented, angry, guilty, happy, sad, embarrassed, afraid, and helpless. These feelings may be confusing and difficult to handle. However, they are neither good nor bad; they are normal. Negative feelings do not mean that you are not a good caregiver; they mean you are human. Recognize that you are doing the best you can.

### SHARE YOUR FEELINGS

It is important to share your feelings with others. Find someone you are comfortable with, then talk about how you feel or what is troubling you. This person may be a close friend or family member, someone you met at an ALS support group, a member of your religious community, or a health care professional. Sharing your feelings, especially with a trained professional, can assist you in managing them and keeping them from undermining your caregiver role.

### LOOK FOR GOOD THINGS

Your attitude can make a big difference to the way you feel. Try to look at the positive side of things. Look for ways the person can continue to exercise their physical and intellectual capacity. Work to make every day count. There will continue to be times that are special and worthwhile.

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ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA • LA SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SLA

To connect with your local ALS Society, call toll free 1-800-267-4257 or visit <http://www.als.ca>

**We can live without ALS.**

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## **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

Your own health is important. Do not ignore it. Eat proper meals and take regular exercise. Find ways to relax and make sure you get the rest you need. Make regular appointments with your doctor for check-ups. These things will help you deal with stress and allow you to continue to give good care.

As well, you need regular breaks so you can sustain interests outside of caregiving. Do not wait until you are too exhausted to plan this. Take time to keep up with things that are important to you. This will give you strength and help prevent you from feeling lonely and isolated.

## **LOOK FOR HUMOUR**

ALS is serious, but you do not have to take yourself seriously all of the time. Seeing humour in situations does not lessen the sincerity of your care.

### **LIVING WITH SOMEONE WITH ALS IS CHALLENGING.**

**We have learned that life can be easier by:**

- **understanding the disease and its effects**
- **learning more about how to give care**
- **taking care of yourself**
- **asking for help**
- **accepting help**
- **being creative, patient, and realistic**
- **planning for the future**

## **GET HELP**

**SUPPORT.** You will need the support that comes from sharing thoughts and feelings with others. Find a way that you are comfortable with – individually with a professional or as part of an ALS support group.

**PRACTICAL HELP.** It can be hard to ask for and accept help. It is important to know that asking for help is not a sign of poor caregiving. You need to realize that you cannot care for a person with ALS alone.

**ASK.** Ask family and friends for help; most people are only too willing to help. There are programs to provide you with relief or assistance with household chores and caregiving tasks. Your local ALS Society can assist in accessing services in your community.

Determine what kind of help you need, and let people know.

## **PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

Planning for the future can help in relieving stress. While the person with ALS is able, review his/her financial situation and plan accordingly. Choices related to future health and personal care decisions should be considered and when necessary, recorded. Also consider an alternate caregiving plan should you be unable to continue giving care.

**THE ALS SOCIETY HAS INFORMATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS.**

**FIND THE SOCIETY NEAREST YOU AND GIVE THEM A CALL.**

**WE ARE HERE TO HELP.**

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

**www.als.ca • 1-800-267-4257**

*This brochure is adapted with permission from the Alzheimer's Society of Canada*

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