



# TAKING CARE of Ourselves:

## Self-care for the Provider By Howard R. Winokuer PhD

Isolation, frustration, irritability, boredom, depression, anxiety and outbursts of anger are all signs of stress associated with caring for someone with a long-term or chronic illness, says Dr. Charles Figley, one of the country's leading experts in stress. Often times, these signs of stress can be debilitating to the caregiver and preclude our ability to care for our loved ones as we would like. For those of you caring for someone with PKD, you know exactly what I mean.

As a caregiver, you may have experienced extremely high levels of stress, with emotional and physical symptoms, including sleep disturbance, loss of energy and feeling tired, reduced resistance to infection, problems concentrating, headaches, backaches, muscle aches and gastrointestinal complaints. All of these symptoms are normal but avoidable.

Caring for oneself while caring for others is critical; not only to help us take care of our loved ones, but also to help us be able to take care of ourselves. **The following tips, suggested by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, are not meant to be all inclusive. Pick the ones that you believe will help you in your efforts to stay physically and emotionally healthy.**



**Recognize that when you are caring for a loved one, there is a high risk for burnout.** While helping your family member has its rewards, it also has its dangers. Keeping yourself aware that you are "at risk" for burnout will help keep you from denying the existence of stress related signs and symptoms.



**Remind yourself** that mistakes are an integral part of learning and growth and are not reflections of your self-worth.



**Practice setting limits** and alleviating stresses you can do something about.



**Learn effective time-management skills.** Set practical goals for how you spend your time. Don't allow time to become an enemy.



**Work to cultivate a personal support system.** A close personal friend can be a real lifesaver when it comes to managing stress and preventing burnout. If you have already reached the crisis state of burnout, realize you may well need the help of others. Many caregivers have trouble asking for help. If this is the case for you, practice giving yourself permission to seek outside support.



**Develop healthy eating, sleeping and exercise patterns.** We are often aware of the importance of these areas for others; however, we sometimes neglect them ourselves. A well-balanced diet, adequate sleep and regular exercise allows for our own physical, mental and emotional well-being.



**Create periods of rest and renewal.** The quickest way to burnout is spreading yourself too thin. Learn to respect your mind and body's need for periods of rest after a long day.



**Be compassionate with yourself about not being perfect.** After all, none of us are!



**Strive to identify the unique ways in which your body informs you that you are stressed.** Do you get tightness in the shoulders, backaches, headaches? Becoming conscious of how your body communicates stress signals to you allows for awareness of stressful situations before they overwhelm you. A constant state of physical tension often results in deterioration which results in physical breakdown.

In conclusion, it is helpful to remember that as we struggle with the stress associated with caring for a loved one with PKD, it is important for each of us to remember that supporting someone who is unable to care for him/her self is not just a responsibility; it is a gift and a privilege.

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