



# Pre-Appointment Decision Box

## Stress in Caregivers of Older Adults

### Choosing a Support Option

A caregiver is a person (family, friend, or neighbour) who provides unpaid and often ongoing personal, social, psychological, and physical support for those with frailty, illness, degenerative disease, physical/cognitive/mental disability, or end of life circumstances. While fulfilling, caregiving can be demanding and stressful. It is important to pay attention to warning signs of stress: anger, anxiety, depression, exhaustion, lack of sleep, health problems, or social withdrawal.

There are several options to reduce caregiver stress. Depending on your priorities, you may or may not decide to make a change. The choice is up to you. These options can cause benefits or harms and it is difficult to predict how they will work for you. We recommend that the decision take into account your values and priorities, and that you share this decision with a healthcare professional.

#### Consider the following:

1. *What is my main issue/concern with providing care?*
2. *What do I need to do to make sure I stay healthy while caregiving?*
3. *What else do I need to know?*



#### What is most important to you?

SELECT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND LOOK AT THE OPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IT.

✓ Choose a single item at a time.

**Improve my well being**

OPTIONS TO LIMIT YOUR STRESS:



**Reduce symptoms of depression**

OPTIONS TO LIMIT YOUR STRESS:



**Avoid taking time to make a change**

OPTIONS TO LIMIT YOUR STRESS:



**Avoid making a change if the impacts are uncertain**

OPTION TO LIMIT YOUR STRESS:



**Avoid negative changes to my relationship with friends and family**

OPTION TO LIMIT YOUR STRESS:



**Other:**

# Options to limit your stress



## Physical Activity

Good choices are walking, water exercises, balance or flexibility exercises, and weight training. The activity should make you feel warm and make you breathe harder. You should be able to hold a conversation but may find it difficult to sing.

**BENEFITS:** Increased well-being and reduced stress.

**HARMS:** Increased chance of injury.

**PRACTICAL ISSUES:** In general, to experience positive impacts from physical activity, people must be physically active for at least 3 weeks, either for 20 minutes 3 times a week, or for 2 hours once a week. Whatever the duration and frequency of the exercise, it takes time.



## Psychoeducation

There are programs that teach caregivers the skills needed in their caregiving role. These programs provide information about the health conditions of the person they care for, as well as resources and services available. Other topics may include behaviour or mood management. Education can be offered individually over the phone or on the Internet, or in a group.

**BENEFITS:** Decreased stress, reduced symptoms of depression, and increased well-being.

**PRACTICAL ISSUES:** Education takes time. To have a positive impact, 1-2 weekly sessions (1 hour each) over a period of 8 weeks is recommended.



## Support Groups

Support groups are a safe space to talk about your experience, share ideas, and celebrate successes. There are various formats, including face-to-face meetings, video or teleconferences, and online communities.

**BENEFITS:** Decreased stress and increased well-being.

**HARMS:** You may be uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups.

**PRACTICAL ISSUES:** It may be hard to attend meetings because you are not able to leave the person you care for, it may be far from your home, or held at an inconvenient time.



## Respite Care

Respite care consists of a wide range of services to temporarily relieve caregivers of some of their duties. Respite can be provided by professionals or volunteers in your home or at another location. Respite can last anywhere from a few hours to several days.

**BENEFITS:** Fewer symptoms of depression.

**HARMS:** Acknowledging you need help may cause feelings of failure or guilt. The person you care for may feel reluctant to use respite care, which can cause more stress for you. Care recipients may experience a loss of mobility when exercise is not maintained during respite.



## Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy aims to improve an individual's well-being and mental health by having them talk with a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other mental health provider. During psychotherapy, you learn about your condition and your mood, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Psychotherapy may be delivered in person (one-on-one or with couples, or in groups), over the phone or via the Internet.

**BENEFITS:** Decreased stress, fewer depressive symptoms, increased well-being.

**HARMS:** You may experience negative emotions, stigmatization, or negative effects on relationships.

**PRACTICAL ISSUES:** Your family doctor can refer you to a psychotherapist. There may be a wait list. If you use a psychotherapist in the private sector, there may be a cost of \$100- 225 per session. It is recommended that you discuss this with your health care provider.



## Wait and monitor

Waiting and monitoring consists of keeping an eye on your stress levels without undertaking treatment or changing your lifestyle.

**BENEFITS:** Avoid making a change if impacts are uncertain, avoid the inconvenience associated with support options and time to find solutions on your own.

**HARMS:** Increased risk of experiencing health problems.

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