

# Discover the Key to Caregiver Respite: Unwind with Peace of Mind with WMEC's CARE Program

Let's face it. Caregiving is hard. Taking care of a loved one who is ill, elderly, or has a disability can be the most rewarding thing you will ever undertake, but it can also be the most stressful. On one hand, caring for a friend or family member demonstrates your love and commitment, and allows them to retain their independence, often keeping them at home rather than in a nursing facility. On the other, exhaustion, worry, inadequate resources, and the continuous demands are enormously stressful.

## **Common Causes of Caregiver Stress**

Caregivers may feel unsupported by family members or healthcare professionals, leading to feelings of frustration and resentment. Caregivers may also feel isolated from their friends and social networks due to their caregiving responsibilities. Financial strain can be a significant source of stress for caregivers, especially if they have to pay for medical expenses or reduce their work hours. If you feel you had no choice in taking on the responsibilities of caring, or are caring for someone with the hope of repairing a relationship, the chances are greater that you will experience strain, distress, and resentment. Additionally, some caregiver situations are more stressful than others. For example, the stress of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or related dementia is often compounded by the grief and loss that so often comes with this diagnosis. Lastly, your own ability to cope is a big factor in your stress level. Everyone's coping skills take a beating when under constant strain, and how you cope with stressful situations can be a huge issue if your coping mechanisms are compromised.

## **Risks of Caregiving**

Studies have found that caregivers face an increased risk for depression, chronic illness, a decline in quality of life, and even early death. Caregivers often report putting off medical appointment for themselves, sleep deprivation, poor eating habits, failure to exercise, and failure to care for themselves when ill. It can lead to physical, emotional, psychological, and financial strain.

## **The Benefits of Respite Care**

Caregivers often feel they can't take time away, whether it's to attend a family function, take a vacation or trip, simply relax in a bubble bath with a good book, or just get a

good night's sleep. However, these moments away are often what allows you to keep giving. Respite care provides a break from caregiving responsibilities, allowing caregivers to take care of their own needs and recharge. Respite care can reduce stress and improve mental and physical health for caregivers. It can also strengthen relationships between caregivers and care recipients, as caregivers can return to caregiving with renewed energy and a positive attitude. Respite care can also benefit care recipients, as they may benefit from a change of routine and interaction with different caregivers.

### **WestMass ElderCare Offers Solutions**

WestMass ElderCare is proud to announce the Caregiver Assistance, Respite and Enrichment (CARE) program, our newly expanded paid caregiver respite program. CARE offers caregivers options for obtaining respite care. WMEC has always offered caregiver supports, but the CARE program offers new flexibility for when, how, and how often caregivers can receive respite care services. Caregivers also have the option of hiring their own respite care provider, which may be a trusted family member or friend, or a professional caregiver from one of WMEC's partner agencies.

"We understand the challenges that caregivers face, and we're committed to providing the support they need to succeed," said Roseann Martoccia, Executive Director of WestMass ElderCare. "Our CARE program is just one of the ways we're working to make caregiving easier and more manageable for families in Western Massachusetts."

Among the services that WestMass ElderCare offers caregivers are support, assistance and training, help with finding resources and services, grants for equipment that helps both caregivers and care recipients such as grab bars and emergency response systems, and, now, expanded and flexible respite care options.

So caregivers, take note and have hope! Next time you have a family reunion or wedding to attend, want to plan a vacation or trip, or simply need a day off, contact WMEC at 413.538.9020 or [info@wmeldercare.org](mailto:info@wmeldercare.org). Our Family Caregiver Specialist is here to help. You are not alone!