

Do you ever experience periods of stress? We bet you answer yes to this question.
What is the definition of stress for people in caregiving positions?
How to identify it? And how do we respond to it?

Each caregiver experiences his or her role differently, has his or her own baggage values and beliefs. Therefore, stressful elements create different reactions from one person to the next. Here are just a few examples:



It can happen that a situation or an event reduces the areas of power on which it is possible to act in order to adapt.

My loved one has no filter and says whatever he thinks. I don't dare go to restaurants with him anymore.

Unpredictability has an impact on the state of the caregiver. It's possible to know the beginning but rarely the end. And even less so how it will unfold. Indeed, the unexpected is many and varied.

The caregiver has to deal with many new things at the same time, over varying periods of time.

My loved one is going to respite care for the first time. I had to learn how the day center worked, set up adapted transport, while learning to share my responsibilities with new caregivers.

The continual adaptations required by caregivers open the door to many questions, reveals vulnerabilities and exposes the person to unwanted advice and reactions.

From now on, I choose my relative's clothes, because every morning we argued about it. My family objected because they felt I was overdoing it and overprotecting him.

*Inspired from Lupien, S. (2019) Recette du stress, Centre d'études sur le stress humain (CESH)
<https://www.stresshumain.ca/le-stress/comprendre-son-stress/source-du-stress/>*

Caregivers have spoken out. Here's a list of stress symptoms they identified.

Physical

Difficulty with digestion
Headaches
Agitation
COURBATURES
Feeling sick more often
Clammy hands
Increased heart rate



Psychological

Vigilance
Irritability
Impatience
Foggy mind
Being on edge
Impulsivity
Lack of concentration
Worry

Stress is part of life, and not all of it is negative. It helps to get us moving and in action. It's an alarm system that can sharpen our vigilance in knowing and setting limits.



The following test can help you identify the level of stress in your role as a caregiver

Indicate your stress level from 0 to 3 (0 = never; 1 = sometimes; 2 = often; 3 = always):

- ☐ You and your loved one are experiencing a destabilizing event, such as hospitalization.
- ☐ You are considering relocating yourself or your loved one.
- ☐ You don't feel heard and/or recognized.
- ☐ You need to make one or more important decisions quickly.
- ☐ You or your loved one is in the process of having or clarifying a diagnosis.
- ☐ You have no control over the situation.
- ☐ You have to take on new responsibility(s).
- ☐ You are feeling pressure from those around you and/or those involved in your loved one's care.
- ☐ You have to organize yourself alone and/or with few resources to meet all the - responsibilities.
- ☐ You feel inadequate in a situation.
- ☐ You are very demanding of yourself when it comes to the results you expect from your tasks.
- ☐ Despite your best efforts, you're not getting much in the way of results.

The stress level assessment scale

Score between 0 and 12

Your stress management seems adequate. Congratulations, you've probably implemented strategies for your situation.

Score between 13 and 24

Your stress is starting to take up more space. Be careful! Do you want to explore more strategies for learning stress management?

Score between 25 and 36

You are at risk of chronic stress. You experience many signs and symptoms on a daily basis. It may be helpful to discuss them with a healthcare professional.

Here's what some of the caregivers surveyed do to reduce their feelings of stress:

- Daily meditation, conscious breathing (deep breathing);
- Get your body moving: walk, cycle, dance;
- Repeat your own mantras, those little phrases that make you feel good;
- Reflect and find your power zones, allowing yourself to make trial and error;
- Increase your knowledge through different sources: support groups, books, conferences;
- Seek support from loved ones (phone calls, activities);
- Delegate certain tasks;
- Learn to say no;
- Decrease your contact with suffering, for example: stop listening to the news for a few weeks.