



The mental load of caregiving: a reality that is difficult to identify

Accompanying, caring for, being with, supporting, comforting, listening, planning, organizing... these are some of the daily tasks involved in caregiving.

It seems simple, but as daily tasks and responsibilities pile up, it can quickly lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, invaded, and exhausted.



Do any of these three actions apply to your daily life?

(Over)planning

Feeling like your best friend is your calendar and agenda.



Tomorrow, I'll have to confirm Dad's next appointment with the optometrist. I'll make a note to ;take time off work to accompany him, find his health insurance card, and cancel the adapted transportation to the day center...

You may be developing skills to coordinate appointments in order to maximize your days. You may be mastering the art of anticipating everything you will need for the different tasks of the week.

Managing

Do you feel like a juggler?

Do your plans have to be moved, postponed, canceled, or changed at every turn?



I had an appointment with my dentist for a minor emergency, but my partner fell while getting up. After checking that she wasn't hurt, I noticed that she was weak and dizzy. I couldn't leave her alone. I made several calls to find someone to stay with her for a few hours.

You are probably developing great skills in leadership, creativity, flexibility, and communication through all this support management.

Doing

Feeling like you are the main person who carries out various tasks and responsibilities.



Tonight, I helped my friend do her exercises. Her paralysis has greatly disabled her, but I witnessed her first steps without assistance since her accident. We were so happy that I can't find the words to express how I felt.

You are undoubtedly creating precious moments and meaningful memories.



For those around you: become a source of kindness

Sometimes, “planning, managing, and doing” can be reassuring for a caregiver, as it allows them to have some control over a chaotic, unpredictable, and highly unsettling situation. If you notice that a caregiver in your circle seems overwhelmed by their mental load, it is best to avoid guilt-inducing comments such as: “Come on, you're worrying too much,” or “That doesn't make sense.”

Instead, take a reassuring and open approach: “You seem to have a lot on your plate. Would you like to talk about it?”



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What are the impacts of mental load on caregivers?

Your thinking is slowed down or confused



You think about your challenges constantly

You feel guilty or like a failure



You have memory lapses or you feel lost

You feel or say that you no longer have time for yourself

Your mood is changeable and intense



These events can impact your sleep and your overall health. They can even become risk factors for burnout and compassion fatigue. It is therefore likely that you will feel the need to reduce this mental load.

Remember that this situation has developed over time and through a series of events. It is therefore normal that it will take some time to regain a more comfortable balance.

Reducing mental load: is it possible in caregiving?

Treat yourself to kindness

There is no right or wrong time to start reducing your mental load. The important thing is to respect your abilities and your pace.

Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Identify the strengths and skills that have enabled you to adapt so far
- Pay attention to comments from those around you (family, friends, caregivers, neighbors, etc.). They probably point out your strengths and skills from time to time, as well as when your mental load may seem high.
- Think about your energy level and your overall health. This can have an impact on when and how you ask for help.
- Learn to recognize what truly makes you feel good, your moments of comfort.
"Showering with my partner, even if it's to help him wash, is a moment I enjoy. However, with the current challenges, it's taking more and more time. That's what prompted me to ask my aunt for help with the housework. She comes over to wash the dishes and do a few chores two or three evenings a week, which frees up precious hours for me."
- Share what you are going through. This can help you release some tension and validate your experiences and feelings.

