

Tip Sheet # 27



Dealing with My Own Emotions While Providing Care

Many family caregivers feel depressed, sad, nervous, or angry while providing care. Other emotions are common too.

What negative emotions do I have?

Put an X beside all of the emotions listed below that you have had over the past 2 weeks.

- ☐ Mood fluctuations (up one minute, down the next)
- ☐ Anxiety or fear (being scared)
- ☐ Nervousness or feeling uneasy
- ☐ Anger or feeling mad about something
- ☐ Frustration or can't seem to get over something
- ☐ Depression or feeling sad
- ☐ Guilt or embarrassment (feeling ashamed)
- ☐ Poor outlook or feelings of hopelessness
- ☐ Feelings of loss (miss the way things were before the stroke)
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____

Negative emotions like those listed above can be from:

- Your caregiving situation
- Something that has happened in your life
- Feelings about yourself or others
- Changes in your body chemistry

It's "okay" to have different emotions and even feel lost at times. Many caregivers are not prepared for the range of emotions they may feel.

Whatever the reasons for your negative emotions, there are things that you can do to feel better.

Depression is very common in family caregivers.

Circle the number (0, 1, 2, or 3) for how often you have had each of the 9 depressive symptoms below.

PHQ-9: Over the last 2 weeks, how often have <u>you</u> been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

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Add up the numbers you circled above for a total score. **Total Score:** ____

Look at the chart below to see your level of depressive symptoms.

My level of depressive symptoms is: _____

Total PHQ-9 Score	Level of depressive symptoms
Total score 0 – 4	Minimal
Total score 5 - 9	Mild
Total score 10 - 14	Moderate
Total score 15 – 19	Moderately severe
Total score 20 - 27	Severe



You should call the doctor or a health professional if:

- Your Total Score for depressive symptoms is 10 or above
- Your level of depressive symptoms is:
 - Moderate
 - Moderately Severe
 - Severe
- You have had thoughts of being better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way
- You have any questions about how to manage **any** of your emotions

Do not be afraid to seek professional help from your doctor or others involved in your care. Negative thoughts and emotions can be very difficult to control on your own. **Medications and psychological counseling are often prescribed, and are very effective.** It is far better to seek treatment than to allow the downward spiral of depression interfere with providing care. **Talking with another caregiver or someone who has “been there, done that” can also help.** Others sometimes do not understand what it is really like to be a caregiver.

Place an X beside all of those below who you think you can seek help from.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ 911 if an Emergency | ☐ Crises/Suicide line 1-800-273-8255 |
| ☐ Stroke survivor's doctor | ☐ https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org |
| ☐ Caregiver's doctor | ☐ ASA Warmline 1-888-4-STROKE |
| ☐ Psychiatrist | ☐ Mental health clinic |
| ☐ Neurologist | ☐ Local hospital |
| ☐ Neuropsychologist | ☐ Support group |
| ☐ Psychologist | ☐ Other stroke survivors |
| ☐ Counselor | ☐ Other caregivers |
| ☐ Priest or Pastor | ☐ Family and Friends |
| ☐ Nurse | ☐ Other _____ |

Write the telephone numbers for each of the above that you put an X by. Look in the yellow pages in your telephone book under “Mental Health” or “Hospitals” for more help.

More places I can seek professional help _____

So... You can call the doctor or another professional for help with your emotions. You can also call a trusted family member, friend, or fellow caregiver for advice and support. Are there other things you can do to manage your emotions?

The answer to this question is **yes**. Toward the beginning of your notebook, there is a workbook called, “**Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB6. Stress Management Workbook for Caregivers and Survivors.**” This workbook will help you:

- Realize that thoughts are different from emotions
- Look at the thoughts you are having
- Revise your thoughts to be more realistic and positive
- Use strategies to help you manage your stress

Some of the strategies mentioned in the workbook include the following:

- **Look at how realistic your thoughts are.** Get rid of words like “always” and “never.” Also get rid of “should,” “must,” and other words that make you set expectations that are too high for yourself.
- **Make a victory list of successes.** Pat yourself on the back for the good things you do.
- **Stop asking yourself, “What if?”** Instead, ask yourself, “Is this likely to happen?” “Can I prevent it?” “Can I do anything about it?” If not, don’t waste your time and energy worrying.
- **Listen to your inner critic.** Are you saying mean things to yourself? Putting yourself down? Would you tell someone else the same thing if they were in your shoes? Be a friend to yourself.
- **Keep a daily journal of your thoughts and feelings.** Writing helps you think things through. Tell your story. Keep a section of your journal for funny things too.



- **Make a list of pleasant activities.** Be sure to make time for fun activities. You also need time for yourself. Make it part of your daily schedule. Find a hobby you like (e.g. reading, gardening, sewing, woodworking). See **Tip Sheet #33 Keeping my own social life going.**
- **Keep a good sense of humor.** Laughter is good for you. Try to see the humor in things that happen. Maybe watch funny movies or read funny books. Smile at others to see how many you can get to smile back.
- **Use imagery.** Imagine yourself handling your problems. Rehearse in your mind how to solve a problem. Picture yourself as being strong.
- **Relaxation.** Take the time to sit in a quiet place and totally relax every muscle in your body. A quick 10 minutes of relaxation can do wonders. Start with your toes and work all the way to the top of your head. Don't forget to relax your face muscles!
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat right, exercise, get enough sleep, and get regular checkups. Get your blood pressure checked!



Taking care of someone who has had a stroke is often very difficult. There are many emotions that family caregivers have while providing care. Try to find ways to help manage your negative emotions. Call a doctor or health professional to help you deal with your own emotions. Work through the workbook toward the beginning of this notebook. Talk with family and friends about how you are feeling. Managing your emotions will help you, as well as your loved one with stroke.



Self-Help Books:

Burns, D. D. (1999). *The Feeling Good Handbook* (Rev. ed.). New York: Plumb Printing. ISBN 0-452-28132-6

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C.A. (2016). *Mind over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way you Think*. Second Edition. New York: The Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-2042-8.

Organizations and Websites:

American Stroke Association's Toll-Free Warmline and Website
1-888-4-STROKE or 1-888-478-7653, www.StrokeAssociation.org

National Institute for Mental Health, 1-866-615-6464 (toll-free),
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>