

The Personal Risks of Being a Family Caregiver

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There are several different types of family caregivers: people caring for life partners/spouses who become ill or disabled, parents caring for children with disabilities, adult children caring for aging parents, family members caring for an injured veteran who returns from war, or to a loved one who suffers a traumatic brain injury after a car/industrial accident or is the victim of gun violence. Many caregivers even perform more than one caregiving role such as providing care to an elderly parent with dementia and to a child with a disability – also referred to as a sandwich caregiver. Due to their dedication, limiting beliefs, and desire to do it all, many caregivers are at great risk for burnout that puts their loved ones and themselves at risk.

Almost every family caregiver throughout the world assumes her/his role accidentally and without pre-planning. The role emerges as a result of an unexpected family member illness, injury, or disability. When duty calls, the caregiver jumps in to support the loved one in need without hesitation and puts other parts of their life on hold or on the back burner.

Extremely busy days are the norm for caregivers. They may feel as if they are swimming upstream to get all family tasks and needs met. Caregivers often put the needs of the loved ones receiving care ahead of their own desires and goals. They pass on job opportunities, decrease work hours, or even leave jobs, which can diminish their own financial security. They may stop focusing on personal health and wellness and gain or lose a significant amount of weight, which increases their risk for serious illness or disease.

Because the caregiving road is filled with potholes of medical and financial setbacks, caregivers often live in a state of crisis and fear. The caregiver walks hand in hand with their loved one through doctor appointments, blood tests, medical scans, and associated therapies and treatment regimens. Although the patient is the one that directly experiences the physical and emotional pain through treatment, the caregiver cringes with every moan of their loved one and every troubling word of the doctor. They are left feeling sad and helpless much of the time.

As the disappointments and painful moments accumulate, the caregiver can become consumed with fear and believe they are living under a perpetual dark storm cloud. Although many caregivers perform heroically and show a positive face to support their friends and loved ones,

they can break down physically and emotionally if they dwell too much on what they cannot control.

Caregivers usually devote little or no time to having fun with friends or intimate partners. They can become bored and depressed with increasing isolation. They may give up personal hobbies and recreational activities that previously provided great fulfillment and joy. Stress and worry dominate thoughts throughout each day and the caregiver can even feel as though they are at the brink of collapse under the heavy burden of responsibilities. Basically, the life of a caregiver can sadly transform to one of all work, no play, and no joy.

If you are a family caregiver and experience some or all of the characteristics described above, you are not alone. Many people are experiencing increasing caregiving responsibilities and committing all of their time and effort to provide support to their loved ones. There are approximately 65 million caregivers in the United States who provide an annual estimated \$450 billion value in services to their family members and friends. These numbers are expected to continue to grow rapidly with the aging population (The National Alliance for Caregiving, 2012).

The good news is that with a renewed commitment to self it is possible to recharge your caregiving energy now and save your own life in the process. Think about it this way. Before an airplane takes off, the flight attendant shares emergency instructions. One of the primary directions is that when the oxygen masks drop overhead, it is vital for parents to place them on themselves before applying to the children. Otherwise, they run the risk of passing out which could lead to death for both the parent and child. The same principle applies to effective caregiving. Apply the oxygen mask first to yourself and then apply it to your loved one. For caregivers, the key to accessing your oxygen mask and recharging caregiving energy is to assess one's level of burnout risk.

You can access a free caregiving burnout risk assessment at www.bloomforcoach.com. If you are a caregiver in need of a life-saving boost, apply your oxygen mask, take a deep breath, and take the journey to a life filled with more satisfaction while providing high quality care you can be proud of. After all, you deserve it!

About Michael Bloom

Since 2011, Certified Professional Coach and Energy Leadership™ Master Practitioner Michael Bloom has helped to energize the careers of hundreds of family and professional caregivers with practical, tactical soul-saving coping strategies that support them in saving lives - including their own. Bloom walks the talk as he served for several years as the primary, live-in caregiver

for both of his parents during their end-of-life journeys. He is on a mission to support fellow caregivers to avoid burnout so they can provide dedicated care to their loved ones free from regret.

Whether you work with Michael in a private mentoring program, choose emergency roadside assistance coaching, or engage with him in one of his compelling and practical group workshops, you are sure to immediately recharge your energy and take inspired action towards achieving the life of abundance and joy that you so richly deserve.