

## IDENTIFYING CAREGIVER STRESS

Caregiving is not easy. Stress is a fact of caregiving. Each one of us has warning signs that tell us we're experiencing stress. If we identify and respond to our early warning signs, we can prevent the destructive impact of stress.

One of the most important things we can do is to take care of ourselves on a daily basis. It's often hard to identify what it is YOU need to carry on as a loving caregiver but you will do a better job of caregiving in the long run if you take care of yourself in the short run.

Here are some signs that may tell you if stress is affecting your life:

- Do you have muscle tightness, back and shoulder aches?
- Do you have headaches that never go away?
- Have you gained/lost weight? Do you become ill more often than you used to?
- Are you unable to sleep? Do you wake up in the middle of the night and then can't get back to sleep and lie awake for hours? Do you have nightmares and/or stressful dreams?
- Do you feel exhausted all the time?
- Are you restless, so that even when you get a chance to relax, you cannot do so?
- Are small incidents making you irritated or angry? Do you have mood swings?
- Have you withdrawn from friends and family?
- Have you given up hobbies and interests you once enjoyed? Are you spending less time with others?
- Are you feeling increasingly hopeless about your current situation?
- Do you have an increased reliance on alcohol to relax, pills to sleep, tranquilizers to calm down?
- Are you having difficulty controlling your temper around the person you are caring for and others?
- Do you feel despair, overwhelmed, depressed or overanxious?