Caring for the Adult's Caregiver

Caring for an older adult can be rewarding and fulfilling, but can also place great physical, emotional, and financial demands on those who take care of them. More than 80 percent of late-life care is provided by unpaid family members. Sometimes the needs of a caregiver are secondary to those of the aged person in need of care. But failing to meet one's own needs can lead to stress, depression, and physical problems on the part of the caregiver.

Occupational therapists can help caregivers achieve a balance in which the older adult's needs are met as well as the rest of the family's.

What can an occupational therapy practitioner do?

- **Promote** well-being through activities that encourage creativity and coping strategies.
- **Provide** strategies to balance work, caregiving, and family demands.
- **Recognize** that the needs of caregivers must be met in addition to the needs of an older adult with a disability or disorder.
- **Encourage** caregivers to accept that feeling stress, anger, frustration, and sadness at the situation is not uncommon, and that it is acceptable to express these feelings.
- **Explore** coping strategies and encourage healthy activities such as exercise, group or individual therapy, and hobbies.
- **Stay informed** of current research on conditions and intervention techniques to share with clients.

What can families do?

- **Join** a therapy or discussion group for caregivers of older adults.
- **Share** the responsibility of caring for an older adult.
- **Ask** others for help.
- **Develop** a schedule that distributes caregiving responsibility.
- **Consider** adult day care or home health aides to provide occasional breaks to full-time caregivers.
- **Create** moments of joy throughout the day by participating in pleasurable activities, if only for a few minutes.

Need more information?

Frequent depression and stress is a serious problem and could cause physical and emotional complications to all family members. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist, practitioners are available through most hospitals, medical centers, and clinics. Talk to your family physician or contact your local health officials for more information about occupational therapy.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping people with a broad range of physical, developmental, and behavioral conditions. In addition to treating illness and disability, occupational therapy encourages wellness through a balance of healthy and meaningful life activities.

AOTA® The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.
www.aota.org
Occupational Therapy: Skills for the Job of Living

Copyright 2002 American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
This page may be reproduced and distributed without prior written consent.