

Caregiver Depression:

A Serious Medical Condition

Clinical depression affects an estimated 20% of family caregivers. Even if you're no longer in a caregiving role, you may still be struggling. A recent study found that 41% of former caregivers who looked after a spouse with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia battled with depression for up to three years after the spouse's death.



The best way to fight back is by recognizing the symptoms of depression, making lifestyle changes and seeking medical help when appropriate.

Not everyone who has depression will experience the same symptoms or the same degree of distress. But early attention to symptoms is always your best defense.

Consider talking with a health care professional if you have these symptoms for more than two consecutive weeks:

- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain, digestive disorders)
- Unintentional weight gain or loss
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Persistent fatigue
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Becoming easily agitated or angry
- Feeling that nothing you do is good enough



Action Plan to Fight Caregiver Depression

If you suffer from depression, you already know that comments like “snap out of it” or “it’s all in your head” aren’t helpful. A better approach is to follow the advice of the National Institute of Mental Health on how to establish positive lifestyle changes and reasonable expectations.



- Examine your goals and adjust the ones that are not realistic.
- Break down tasks into smaller, progressive milestones when they are especially large or complex.



- Try not to isolate yourself. Talk with a trusted friend or family member about your experiences and feelings.



- Do something you enjoy, even if it’s a small thing. Take a walk, call a friend, or participate in a socially distanced outdoor meal with other people.

- Don’t expect quick fixes. It takes time for changes to become established.



- Postpone important decisions (job change, marriage, divorce, etc.) until your depression has lifted.

- Ask for and accept help from friends and family.

Medical Treatment for Depression

Medications like Prozac or Zoloft can be prescribed for depressive symptoms that have progressed beyond the mild stage. Medications can be used in conjunction with ongoing psychotherapy. A psychologist or psychiatrist can assess your situation and recommend a personalized treatment plan.

**Learn
More**

Click to read the in-depth report [Depression and Caregiving](#) published by the Family Caregiver Alliance.



**COOK
COUNTY**
BENEFITS CONNECT

Source: Family Caregiver Alliance