

# Your Role As Caregiver Of A TBI Survivor



When someone suffers a traumatic brain injury, the entire family is affected. A family member, or members, often serve in the role of caregiver. You can offer support, encouragement and guidance to your injured family member, and help ensure the treatment plan established is followed once home.

However, at times you may feel overwhelmed, angry, depressed, anxious or be scared. You may also feel alone and worn out by the caregiving responsibilities.

These reactions are normal and typically come and go, but can also be a sign of deeper issues that you might need to address.



## Did You Know?

Many people who work with TBI patients believe that having a Family Caregiver is one of the most important aids to recovery.

## Compassion Fatigue vs Burnout

Compassion Fatigue occurs when you get stressed from continually helping or wanting to help your loved one who is suffering. If not addressed, compassion fatigue worsens your health and your well-being, and reduces your ability to care for your loved one because you just don't have it in you anymore. Compassion Fatigue can come on much more quickly than burnout, and can actually lead to burnout.

Burnout usually develops over time, and is the result of emotional and physical exhaustion, leading to feelings of negativity, indifference and feeling like you are not getting the job done.



## Common Signs of Compassion Fatigue

- Dreading taking care of someone and feeling guilty about it
- Physical and/or emotional exhaustion
- Feeling irritable, disconnected, angry or anxious
- Trouble making decisions
- Problems in personal relationships
- Trouble sleeping
- Reduced sense of accomplishment or meaning in caregiving



# How To Cope With Compassion Fatigue



## 1. Be Aware Of Daily Changes In How You Are Feeling

Your level of stress can change from day to day. Keep a daily record of your rating of how you are feeling, perhaps on a scale of 1-10. You can decide the scale, but the important piece is to watch for consistent changes that might indicate a problem is developing.

## 2. Make Self-Care A Priority!

Taking care of yourself is NOT a luxury. It is necessary, and ultimately will make you a better caregiver. This includes exercising, eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and taking time for yourself. This may involve asking family/friends for help, or seeking a service like respite care. Consider talking to your AHIF Resource Coordinator if you feel like respite care could help. Use your time for yourself that is not caregiving, work or a chore. Consider a hobby or activity you enjoy, something fun and creative just for yourself.



## 3. Spend Time With Friends Or Join A Caregiver Support Group

Social connections help prevent loneliness, isolation and depression. There are many on-line caregiver support groups, and AHIF is working to introduce these as well. These are filled with people in similar situations, who understand what you are going through and can help you with coping ideas, allow you to vent frustrations, and more.

## 4. Write A Journal

Getting your thoughts and feelings down on paper and out of your head has been found to be very therapeutic, and is free and can be done anywhere...anytime.



## 5. Use Positive Ways To Cope With Stress

Make a list of “go-to” coping strategies that are positive and healthy. These can include taking a walk, meditation, doing a 5-minute workout, calling/texting a friend, watching funny video clips on YouTube, or taking a hot bath/shower.

## 6. Speak With A Professional

Often times the fatigue or stress cannot be reduced on our own. A therapist or counselor can help bring relief. If you feel you need to speak to a professional, let your AHIF Resource Coordinator know and AHIF can help.



Please visit [www.ahif.org](http://www.ahif.org) or call the AHIF office at (800) 433-8002 to confirm the appropriate AHIF Resource Coordinator for your location.