



# Caregiver Guide to Battling Burnout

Guide to Establishing Balanced Care



**NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER**  
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# INTRODUCTION

The goal of this guide is to help you address and battle burnout – the result of doing too much for too long without adequate rest or reprieve – by setting self-care goals to help establish balanced care for you and your wounded, ill, or injured (WII) service member.

“There are an estimated 5.5 million military caregivers in our country, including 1.1 million who support our newest generation of post-9/11 veterans...In fact, caregivers report more strains on their relationships at work and at home than non-caregivers. Often, their own health suffers, and they are at higher risk for depression. There are financial consequences too: military caregivers wind up missing as many as three or four days of work a month – and that means lost income as well.”<sup>1</sup>

Burnout doesn’t happen all at once. Rather, it builds through a series of small events. As a caregiver, the temptation is to sacrifice your needs in favor of the person for whom you are caring, even to the point of forgoing taking a shower, getting a bite to eat, or hanging out with friends. While this may seem necessary due to the demands of caregiving, if you want to provide lasting care for your WII member, you need to start caring for yourself. It is not deciding to care for you or your WII member, but balancing care for both of you.

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1. Service AFP. First, Second Ladies Urge Support for Military Caregivers. *U.S. Department of Defense*. April 11, 2014. Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=122042>. Accessed June 5, 2014.

# BURNOUT BASICS

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A week contains 10,080 minutes, and, as a caregiver, your tendency may be to spend each minute focused on the needs of your WII member. However, your ability to provide lasting, quality care depends on your physical, psychological, and emotional health. The information below provides a snapshot of examples of your responsibilities as a caregiver, danger signs of burnout, and tips for mitigating burnout.

## PERSONAL AND CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

- ▶ Grocery shopping
- ▶ House cleaning
- ▶ Cooking
- ▶ Shopping
- ▶ Paying bills
- ▶ Giving medicine
- ▶ Bathing
- ▶ Using the toilet
- ▶ Dressing
- ▶ Eating
- ▶ Doctor visits
- ▶ Physical therapy <sup>2</sup>

## SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

- ▶ Sadness, frustration
- ▶ Sleep problems
- ▶ Over or under eating, or weight loss or weight gain
- ▶ Self-medicating or drinking too much alcohol
- ▶ Decreased energy or fatigue
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- ▶ Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain <sup>3</sup>

## METHODS TO MITIGATE BURNOUT

- ▶ Get Talking – Communicate about care expectations and concerns
- ▶ Get Connected – Build community
- ▶ Get Sharing – Log your experiences
- ▶ Get Help – Obtain assistance from professionals, family, or friends
- ▶ Get Away – Take a break from caregiving, mentally and physically
- ▶ Get Your Zs – Commit to getting your sleep
- ▶ Get Active – Strengthen your body
- ▶ Get Eating – Fuel your body
- ▶ Get a Checkup – Keep regular doctor visits
- ▶ Get Counsel – Talk to a chaplain or counselor

You may already tend to your home, family, occupation, and responsibilities. Now add caregiver-specific responsibilities. Soon the picture may become overwhelming. You may be able to keep up with everything for a time, but eventually, unless you insulate yourself against it, you will experience burnout. This can ultimately cost you your health and your WII member their support. The next section deals with setting self-care goals to help you safeguard your well-being and ensure you are able to provide your WII member lasting care.

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2. Caregiver Stress Fact Sheet. *Office of Women's Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.* July 16, 2012.  
Available at: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/caregiver-stress.html>. Accessed June 05, 2014.

3. When You Become Your Spouse's Caregiver. *Military OneSource.*  
Available at: [http://www.militaryonesource.mil/search?content\\_id=268719](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/search?content_id=268719). Accessed June 05, 2014.

# DASHBOARD

## 4 Steps To Set SMART Self-Care Goals

### How to use this dashboard:

- ▶ Complete the numbered tasks in order
- ▶ Click the available hyperlinks to jump to the respective section
- ▶ Return to the dashboard by clicking the “Return” button

Setting and implementing self-care goals will help you safeguard yourself against burnout by helping you get organized and schedule time to take a break.

Remember to keep your goals SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-sensitive.

Setting SMART goals involves being:

- ▶ **Specific** – Clear and concise
- ▶ **Measurable** – You know whether you have succeeded
- ▶ **Attainable** – It is possible for you to do
- ▶ **Relevant** – Related to your self-care
- ▶ **Time-sensitive** – It will happen by a certain time

Sample goals are provided for each method to mitigate burnout to help you get started.



1

Capture and assess your current schedule. Take an inventory of your activities each day during the week.

2

Review the different methods of mitigating burnout and consider goals you can set to help avoid burnout.

- ▶ **Get Talking** – Communicate about care expectations and concerns
- ▶ **Get Connected** – Build community
- ▶ **Get Sharing** – Log your experiences
- ▶ **Get Help** – Obtain assistance from professionals, family, or friends
- ▶ **Get Away** – Take a break from caregiving, mentally and physically
- ▶ **Get Your Zs** – Commit to getting your sleep
- ▶ **Get Active** – Strengthen your body
- ▶ **Get Eating** – Fuel your body
- ▶ **Get a Checkup** – Keep regular doctor visits
- ▶ **Get Counsel** – Talk to a chaplain or counselor

3

Based on the assessment of your current schedule (step 1) and the evaluation of the methods to mitigate burnout (step 2), set at least one self-care goal to start immediately.

4

Document your desired schedule, insert your goal(s), and schedule in your new commitments.



# CAPTURE YOUR CURRENT SCHEDULE

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1

Document your daily living and other activities throughout the week. Write out the activities you perform related to caring for your WII service member, children, home, occupation, etc. Include things like bathing, eating, working, working out, socializing, housework, and family activities. Capture the time, activity, and duration of the activity. Note which activities are specific to your WII member. You will use this list to help you evaluate where the bulk of your time is being spent and set your self-care goals.

	ACTIVITIES	DURATION		WII Specific?	
		Start	Finish	YES	NO
<b>SUNDAY</b>					
<b>MONDAY</b>					
<b>TUESDAY</b>					
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>					
<b>THURSDAY</b>					
<b>FRIDAY</b>					
<b>SATURDAY</b>					



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET TALKING

2

Address and battle burnout by engaging your WII service member about how best to approach their care. Communication is essential as it will help you and your WII service member work together to establish care expectations. Be open and honest. Document what you want to discuss so you have time to process it, and then sit down to talk.

Examples of what you may want to talk to your WII member about:

- ▶ The amount of care required and your ability to provide it
- ▶ Your comfort level with the amount and kind of care required
- ▶ The possibility of obtaining help from other family, friends, or professionals

In addition to caregiving, you may have a host of other responsibilities, such as taking care of yourself, the house, family, and work. If your WII member requires around-the-clock care, it may be difficult, or nearly impossible, for you to do everything on your own without sacrificing something else.

Certain tasks, such as bathing and toileting, may be uncomfortable or embarrassing for you or your WII member. Express your concerns so you can both work together to determine the best course of action.

Give your WII service member an opportunity to express their desire or expectation for care. Ask them to consider where and from whom they would feel comfortable accepting assistance.



## **CAPTURE YOUR CARE EXPECTATIONS**

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*Sample goal: Every 3 months, I will reevaluate the level of care expectations and options with my WII service member.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET CONNECTED

2

Address and battle burnout by surrounding yourself with support. Get involved in your community, so the community can get involved with you. Make it a goal to start building a community, as it allows you an outlet to share your experiences and needs, and opens the opportunity to obtain help.

You can build a community online and also in-person. The help you receive may come in the form of emotional support and/or physical assistance.

Examples of ways to build a community include:

- ▶ Blogging or vlogging (video blog)
- ▶ Engaging in caregiver support groups in-person or online
- ▶ Participating in church groups
- ▶ Joining other community groups
- ▶ Playing in activity groups, such as softball, kickball, volleyball, etc.

Online support groups, blogs, or vlogs allow you to gain much needed emotional support and advice from friends and others who share in what you are going through.

In-person support groups provide both emotional support and also more tangible help, such as someone bringing a meal, or helping you take care of your lawn or other responsibilities.

## LIST IDEAS TO GET CONNECTED

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*Sample goal: I will play basketball with friends for one hour, once a week.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET SHARING

2

Address and battle burnout by getting your frustrations, worries or concerns, triumphs, hopes and dreams, etc. out of your head and into a log. Track the ups and downs of your days. These can either be just to share with yourself, or others. Set aside 5-15 minutes to capture your thoughts.

Logs can be public or private, and they can be written or recorded on video or audio. Any medium that allows you to share your thoughts and experiences, or just vent. However, each has its benefits and drawbacks.

Writing may be time-consuming as you want to organize your thoughts, but online options allow you to access your log anywhere that you have an internet connection, it is easy to share, if you want, and it's simple to scan through for review.

Audio recording is something you can do anywhere, you can likely even use your phone. However, audio recording can make it difficult to review, as you may have to listen through the entire clip to get to the portion you are looking for.

A video log requires you to have a recording device handy, such as smartphone, but can provide a quick and easy method of sharing your unedited thoughts in real time. Again, you can share the videos or just keep them private.

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

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*Sample goal: I will set aside 15 minutes each week to write out my thoughts, experiences, etc.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET HELP

2

Address and battle burnout with the aid of others. Seeking help is a sign of strength, and may help you add time to your day. Don't wait until you feel overwhelmed; instead, get help early and often.

Use the template to the right and consider:

- ▶ The help you need – Document your needs in the list to the right
- ▶ Potential sources – Professional or family and friends
- ▶ Cost and relative affordability – The expense and overall benefit
- ▶ Frequency – One time or recurring, short or long-term
- ▶ Net benefit of time or reduction of stress to you

Sources of help include professional services or family and friends. Professional services vary in cost, based on the level of help you require. Explore your options by investigating local businesses, and determine which service is right for you, if any. Services you may want to consider:

- ▶ Respite care
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Meal delivery
- ▶ Nursing and/or physical therapy
- ▶ Non-medical (house cleaning, cooking, lawn care)

Family and friends are often more than willing to help. In many cases, they can provide the same help that you might pay for through a professional service.

## **LIST THE AREAS OF YOUR SCHEDULE WHERE YOU CAN USE HELP**

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*Sample goal: I will ask family members or friends to come over to help with lawn care.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET AWAY

2

Address and battle burnout by taking a break. Just like a car runs out of gas if you don't refuel it, you will run out of energy if you don't fill yourself up by doing something just for pleasure.

To start, devote 15 minutes of your day to doing something for yourself. You may also want to plan a weekly or monthly longer-term break, such as going out to eat or away for the weekend.

Examples of ways to get away include:

- ▶ Reading a book
- ▶ Having some quiet time
- ▶ Watching a movie
- ▶ Going out to dinner
- ▶ Socializing with friends in-person, online, or over the phone
- ▶ Going away for a couple of hours to even a day or weekend away.

Learning to get away is a skill that needs to be practiced. You may find it hard to set aside your caregiver role and all the responsibilities that go with it, especially when you are still at home. But, resolve to give yourself some time to recharge.

Use the Get Help section to help discover ways to free up time in your schedule so you can get away.



## LIST IDEAS TO GET AWAY

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*Sample goal: I will read something for pleasure for an uninterrupted 15 minutes each day.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET YOUR Zs

2

Address and battle burnout with sleep. Generally, adults require 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night, however, as a caregiver you may be in the habit of sacrificing sleep given your list of things to do. <sup>4</sup>

Log your sleep debt (the amount of time less than 8 hours) in the table to the right. Also, capture the reason for your lack of sleep. Reasons may include needing to provide around-the-clock care, or anxiety from feeling overwhelmed. Then develop a self-care goal to help get your Zs.

Sleep helps your body recover and prepares you mentally and physically for the next day. Getting adequate sleep promotes learning and memory, growth and development, and even aids in regulating insulin levels, which is linked to maintaining healthy weight. <sup>5</sup>

Lack of sleep may stem from being too busy, or not being able to turn off your brain. If you lack sleep due to being busy, consider what else may impact your sleep schedule and set a goal to unload some responsibilities from your shoulders. If it is a result of feeling overwhelmed, depressed, isolated, etc. consider scheduling an appointment with a chaplain or counselor.

4. How Much Sleep Is Enough? *National Heart Lung and Blood Institute.*

Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/howmuch.html>. Accessed June 05, 2014.

5. Why Is Sleep Important? *National Heart Lung and Blood Institute.*

Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/why.html>. Accessed June 05, 2014.

Sample goal: I will remove one responsibility from my plate by enlisting help from a professional, family, or friends.

	<b>Hours Of Sleep</b> (Target: 8)	<b>Sleep Debt</b> (the amount of time less than 8 hours)	<b>Reason For Lack Of Sleep</b>
<b>SUNDAY</b>			
<b>MONDAY</b>			
<b>TUESDAY</b>			
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>			
<b>THURSDAY</b>			
<b>FRIDAY</b>			
<b>SATURDAY</b>			



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET ACTIVE

2

Address and battle burnout by building strength and stamina through exercise; this will help you keep your energy up, protect yourself from injury, stabilize your mood, and even aid in establishing a solid sleep routine.

When it comes to getting active, you have options. Keep in mind your overall health and consult a physician before starting any rigorous programs.

Options for getting active include:

- ▶ 150 minutes of moderate intensity cardiovascular and strength-training activities (e.g. brisk walking and weight training)
- ▶ 75 minutes of vigorous activity, including cardiovascular and strength-training (e.g. jogging or running and weight training)
- ▶ A mix of moderate and high-intensity cardiovascular and strength-training.<sup>6</sup>

Break up your activities into shorter sessions to minimize the daily impact of being active to your responsibilities as a caregiver. This will help you balance your physical need to be active, and your responsibilities to care for your WII service member.

6. How much physical activity do adults need? *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. December 01, 2011. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/adults.html>. Accessed June 05, 2014.

## LIST IDEAS TO GET ACTIVE

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*Sample goal: I will set aside 15 minutes in the morning to walk and 15 minutes in the evening for weight training 5 days a week.*



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET EATING

2

Address and battle burnout with proper, regular nutrition. As a caregiver, your time is stretched, and finding time to eat healthy may be a challenge. Planning and preparation will help you save time and keep you on a regular eating schedule.

Use the table to the right to make a plan for the meals you will make during the week. Focus on foods that are healthy and easy to make. In addition to planning your meals, consider:

- ▶ Preparing meals in advance so you just need to heat them up
- ▶ Making enough to have leftovers, to have food on hand if you need it
- ▶ Making big batches of individual components to combine into meals

Proper nutrition involves eating regularly, not skipping meals, and consuming a variety of lean proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats.

Planning and preparing your meals ahead of time will help ensure you have food on hand when you need it, so you don't skip meals or resort to unhealthy food options.

*Note:* Staying hydrated is also important, so don't forget to drink plenty of fluids, such as water.

Sample goal: I will schedule a 2 hour block of time one day per week during which to prepare meals for the next week.

	<b>MEALS</b>
<b>SUNDAY</b>	
<b>MONDAY</b>	
<b>TUESDAY</b>	
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	
<b>THURSDAY</b>	
<b>FRIDAY</b>	
<b>SATURDAY</b>	



## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET A CHECKUP

2

Address and battle burnout by tending to your health needs. Practice prevention by scheduling and keeping your own doctor appointments. Regular checkups will help you keep aware of the status of your own health, and may alert you and your doctor to any emerging concerns. This will allow you to take action early and hopefully avoid more serious and lasting health impacts.

Research shows that caregivers:

- ▶ Are more likely to have symptoms of depression or anxiety
- ▶ Are more likely to have a long-term medical problem, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or arthritis

- ▶ Have higher levels of stress hormones
- ▶ Spend more days sick with an infectious disease
- ▶ Have a weaker immune response to the influenza, or flu, vaccine
- ▶ Have slower wound healing
- ▶ Have higher levels of obesity
- ▶ May be at higher risk for mental decline, including problems with memory and paying attention <sup>7</sup>

While you may be extremely focused on your WWII service member's healthcare, as a caregiver you may be neglecting your own. This becomes even more serious in light of the impact of the stresses of caregiving.

7. Caregiver Stress Fact Sheet. Office of Women's Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. July 16, 2012.

Available at: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/caregiver-stress.html>. Accessed June 05, 2014.



# DOCTOR VISIT & QUESTION LOG

*Sample goal: When I feel sick, I will go see my doctor.*

Capture your questions for and answers from your next doctor visit below. Also, document any follow up actions for next steps.

Date |

Doctor |

Reason for Visit

---

Questions to Ask

---

Answers

---

Next Steps

---

Notes

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## Methods to Mitigate Burnout

# GET COUNSEL

2

Address and battle burnout by sharing your feelings and emotions. It is common for caregivers to experience feelings of being overwhelmed, depressed, or isolated. Chaplains and counselors are familiar with, and able to understand, the stresses that caregivers face.

Schedule time with a chaplain or counselor if you experience the following:

- ▶ A persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- ▶ Insomnia or oversleeping
- ▶ Overeating or not eating enough, or weight loss or weight gain
- ▶ Self-medicating or drinking too much alcohol
- ▶ Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling “slowed down”

- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- ▶ Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain
- ▶ Lack of motivation or loss of pleasure
- ▶ Seek help immediately if you have thoughts of death or suicide

Chaplains and counselors are available if you need someone to talk to outside your normal circle of friends. They may also know of resources you can take advantage of if you need assistance with caring for your WWII service member or yourself.

For immediate help, contact the Military Crisis Line. Call: 800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online by visiting [www.militarycrisisline.net](http://www.militarycrisisline.net), or text 838255.

# COUNSELOR VISIT & QUESTION LOG

*Sample goal: I will visit with my counselor once per month for 1 hour to discuss my personal well-being.*

Capture your questions for and answers from your next counselor visit. Also, document any follow up actions or next steps.

Date |

Counselor |

Reason for Visit

---

Questions to Ask

---

Answers

---

Next Steps

---

Notes

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## SET YOUR SELF-CARE GOAL(S)

3

When you are ready, document at least one goal you can start right away, and add it to your desired schedule. You may have more goals in mind, so there is space to write those down. However, start by implementing just one goal and make a commitment to achieving it.

Remember to keep your goals SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-sensitive.

Setting SMART goals involves being:

- ▶ **Specific** – Clear and concise
- ▶ **Measurable** – You know whether you have succeeded
- ▶ **Attainable** – It is possible for you to do
- ▶ **Relevant** – Related to your self-care
- ▶ **Time-sensitive** – It will happen by a certain time or day

If you miss a particular goal, don't try to make it up, just move to the next occurrence and rededicate yourself to keeping it. For example, if you've committed to reading on M/W/F each week, but miss reading on Monday, then just commit to meeting your goal on Wednesday.

If you have more than one goal in mind, consider prioritizing them. Start with one and work toward the others.

## **GOAL**

## **GOAL**

## **GOAL**

## **GOAL**



## DOCUMENT YOUR DESIRED SCHEDULE

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4

Review your current schedule and then document what you would realistically like your schedule to look like. Ensure you schedule in your new goal, and commit to caring for yourself by keeping it. As you gain experience implementing this goal, consider adding another self care goal. Repeat the goal setting process, if necessary.

	ACTIVITY	Goal Accomplished?	
		YES	NO
<b>SUNDAY</b>			
<b>MONDAY</b>			
<b>TUESDAY</b>			
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>			
<b>THURSDAY</b>			
<b>FRIDAY</b>			
<b>SATURDAY</b>			



# RESOURCES

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**Military OneSource: Respite Care**

[http://www.militaryonesource.mil/wounded-warrior?content\\_id=271796](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/wounded-warrior?content_id=271796)

**Military OneSource – Confidential Help**

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/#>

**Navy Chaplain Corps**

<http://www.chaplain.navy.mil/>

**Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor**

<http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil/families/family-newsletter/>

**Wounded Warrior Regiment**

<http://www.bnwest.woundedwarriorregiment.org/>







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