



Family Caregivers – Sleep and Health

Patricia Carter, PhD, RN, CNS (The University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston; School of Nursing)

About 53 million adults in the United States are family caregivers. These caregivers help take care of older family members, spouses, friends, or neighbors. Most caregivers are women (59%), and the average age is around 42 years old. Caregivers usually provide about 20 hours of care each week, but they often don't get paid or receive help like counseling or time off.

Family caregivers are very important. They give physical and emotional support and help their loved ones with everyday needs. They also help connect the people they care for with doctors and health services.

Challenges Family Caregivers Face

Caregiving can be very hard. Many caregivers struggle to balance caring for a loved one with working or taking care of their own families. It can also be stressful and expensive. Because of all these responsibilities, many caregivers feel alone and don't have much support.

Sleep Problems in Caregivers

Getting enough good sleep is very important for caregivers. But many face problems that make it hard to sleep well:

- **Waking Up at Night:** Caregivers may have to help their loved one during the night. This interrupts sleep. In fact, 41% of caregivers are woken up by the person they are caring for.
- **Insomnia:** Stress and worry can make it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep. Around 70% of caregivers for people with dementia have sleep problems.
- **Not Enough Sleep:** Caregiving takes a lot of time. Many caregivers don't get the 7 or more hours of sleep they need. About 60% sleep less than that.

Why Sleep Matters

Good sleep is important for everyone, but it's especially important for caregivers because:

- It helps reduce stress, depression, and burnout. Sleep can also improve mood and energy, making it easier to keep caregiving.





- Many caregivers also have health problems. Good sleep helps the immune system and keeps health conditions like heart disease and diabetes from getting worse.
- Sleep also improves memory and decision-making—important when giving medicine or making care decisions.

Ways to Improve Sleep

Getting more sleep time isn't always possible for caregivers, but improving **sleep quality** is.

These methods have been shown to help:

- *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)*: This therapy helps people change thoughts and habits that hurt sleep. It has helped many caregivers sleep better.
- *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)*: This method uses meditation and yoga to lower stress and improve sleep.
- *Sleep Hygiene Education*: Learning healthy sleep habits—like going to bed at the same time, making the bedroom calm and dark, and avoiding caffeine or screens before bed—can help a lot.
- *Respite Care*: This gives caregivers a break. During these breaks, they can rest and recharge.
- *Support Groups*: Talking to other caregivers can provide support and tips to reduce stress and improve sleep.

In Conclusion

Family caregivers do important work, but it can take a toll on their health, especially their sleep. Helping caregivers get better sleep can improve their well-being and help them provide better care to their loved ones. By using proven strategies, caregivers can take better care of themselves, too.

References:

1. **AgingCare**. *6 Reasons Caregivers Need to Prioritize Sleep*. AgingCare.com, 11 Aug. 2022, <https://www.agingcare.com/articles/reasons-caregivers-need-sleep-151983.htm>.
2. **Alzheimer's Lab**. *Importance of Getting Enough Sleep for Caregivers*. Alzheimer's Lab, 2 Apr. 2023, <https://alzheimerslab.com/importance-of-getting-enough-sleep-for-caregivers/>.
3. **FamilyAssets**. *Sleep Issues for Caregivers: How to Fix Them*. FamilyAssets, 19 June 2024, <https://www.familyassets.com/resources/health/sleep-issues-for-caregivers-how-to-fix-them/>.





Sleep Research Society®

Public Education Papers

4. **Family Caregiver Alliance.** *Seeking the Elusive Good Night's Sleep.* National Center on Caregiving, 26 July 2018, <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/seeking-elusive-good-night-sleep/>.
5. **National Institute on Aging.** *Caregiving.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 24 Aug. 2021, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/toolkits/caregiving>.

