

Buffalo Healthy Living

coping as a family caregiver

Being a caregiver isn't easy. It requires time and patience, and can be emotionally and physically draining. It's not uncommon for caregivers to feel stressed and burned out. Alicia Schwartz, R.N. of VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans says, "Caregivers often feel overwhelmed and



worried, find themselves tired most of the time, and may gain or lose large amounts of weight. Many experience body aches and pains and find they are easily irritated and lose interest in previously enjoyable activities.

To avoid the potential pitfalls of caregiver stress, Schwartz offers the following tips:

Don't strive for perfection. It's difficult to maintain a patient attitude and get everything done perfectly every day. Remember, you're not perfect, so don't punish yourself if you lash out or need a break.

Eat healthy. Make time for nutritious meals to maintain your energy stores and better cope with caregiver stress.

Pay attention to mood changes. Anxiety or depression can sneak up on you when you least expect it. Ask for help if your tasks seem too overwhelming. Seek the help of a doctor if changes in mood, sleeping patterns, and appetite become noticeable.

Take frequent breaks. Setting aside time for yourself away from caregiving can increase your ability to be patient and bounce back. Enjoy time out with friends, meditate, and take deep breaths. Take some "me time." Whenever possible, have a friend or relative step in to give you a break.

Explore home health care resources to engage a licensed home health aide and take some of the responsibilities off your shoulders.

For information about VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans and home care assistance available from the not-for-profit Visiting Nurse Service of New York, call 1-888-867-6555 or visit www.VNSNYCHOICE.org.