

Care for the care partner

by Marcella Durand with Greta Herron

Taking care of someone with MS can strengthen the bonds of love. But whether it's bills and laundry piling up or unaddressed emotions, when caregivers try to take on more than they can handle, they risk being burned out. It's all too common for someone to feel guilty if they spend time on themselves rather than on the person who needs them.

Trouble can creep up

It may start with a feeling that nobody else cares. Soon the caregiver is withdrawing from family and friends. People may even feel like hurting themselves or the person for whom they are caring. Before such serious symptoms occur, there are warnings:

Burnout warning signs

- Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, or helpless
- Losing interest in activities such as hobbies or sports
- Losing or gaining weight
- Trouble sleeping or relaxing
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Being on the verge of tears or crying a lot
- Thinking about death

Don't wait; seek help

Reach out to **friends, family, neighbors**. Ask for help with specific chores or tasks. The first "ask" tends to be the hardest.

Call the **Society** at **1-800-344-4867** to talk with an **MS Navigator** (See "New program helps people 'Navigate' MS," page 19). Whether it's a big question or a little one, the navigator will find the best information, connect the caregiver to useful programs and resources, offer advice, and provide a friendly ear.



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Preventing burnout

Caregivers should remember to eat right and get plenty of exercise and sleep, as well as take regular time off. At first, time spent reading a book, tying trout flies, or doing yoga may feel like time stolen away from someone who needs help. But even an hour or two of rest and relaxation can help fend off burnout.

Where else can caregivers go for help?

Visit nationalmssociety.org/caregiver. Learn more about care options such as home health services, adult day care, respite care services, caregiver support programs, and nursing homes or assisted living facilities. The site also provides links to other organizations, such as the National Family Caregivers Association and the Well Spouse Association. Magazines like **Caring Today** (www.caringtoday.com) and **Today's Caregiver** (www.caregiver.com/magazine) offer news, resources, and sometimes a much-needed laugh. —The authors are **Momentum** staff.