

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

## **Family Caregiver Stress**

Family caregivers face stress every day. Caring for a spouse, parent, or friend with a chronic health condition or disability can be both physically and emotionally challenging. Many caregivers experience ongoing stress with little or no time for rest or relief. Over time, this constant stress can take a serious toll on a caregiver's physical and mental health.

If you are a caregiver, recognizing the signs of stress early is essential. Identifying stress sooner makes it easier to take steps that protect your health. Waiting too long can make recovery more difficult. Start by paying attention to your personal warning signs. Are you more irritable than usual? Are you having trouble sleeping? Do you notice frequent muscle aches or headaches? Everyone experiences stress differently, so understanding your own early indicators is key to preventing more serious problems.

### **Common Warning Signs of Stress**

- Feelings of tension or tight muscles
- Frequent headaches or body aches
- Irritability or mood changes
- Apathy or loss of interest
- High blood pressure
- Forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating

If you are experiencing signs of stress, take time to think about what may be causing them. Identifying your sources of stress can help you decide what changes may be possible.

### **Common Sources of Caregiver Stress**

- Having too much to do
- Feeling unprepared or not up to the job
- Family disagreements
- Lack of support from other family members

Ignoring stress symptoms can lead to serious long-term consequences. Caregivers are at greater risk for developing health problems themselves. They are more likely to feel depressed, isolated, or overwhelmed. Chronic stress can also weaken the immune system, making caregivers more vulnerable to illness.

Stress is a reality of caregiving and cannot be completely eliminated—but it can be managed. While some situations may be beyond your control, consider what changes you *can* make to reduce stress in your daily life.

There are many ways to relieve stress, and it may take time to discover what works best for you. If your stress is physical, try a physical stress reliever. For example, if you have achy shoulders or tense muscles, activities such as taking a walk, swimming, or participating in other forms of exercise may help ease discomfort and improve your mood.

Caregiving is demanding work, and caregivers provide invaluable support to those they love. To continue being the best caregiver possible, it is essential to care for yourself as well. Your health matters too.

The Alzheimer's Association Heart of America Chapter, the Jackson County Senior Center, and K-State Extension—Meadowlark District will host a series of educational programs designed specifically for caregivers. These sessions will focus on practical tools, strategies, and resources to help caregivers navigate their roles more effectively. Participants are welcome to attend all four sessions or select the ones that best meet their needs. All sessions are free and will be held at the Jackson County Senior Center in Holton.

April 10, 2026

**Wednesday, April 29-10:00 a.m.**

Session One: Building Foundations of Caregiving

**Wednesday May 6—10:00 a.m.**

Session Two: Communicating Effectively

**Wednesday May 13—10:00 a.m.**

Session Three: Dementia Related Behaviors.

**Wednesday May 20—10:00 a.m.**

Session Four: Supporting Independence and Exploring Care and Support Services

To sign up for session or for more information about these and other Extension programs please contact Teresa Hatfield at [www.thatfield@ksu.edu](mailto:www.thatfield@ksu.edu) or call 785-364-4125.