

# The Changing Dynamics of Caregiving Couples

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In many relationships, there comes a time when the nature of how couples care for one another changes. It often occurs when one partner develops new limitations or needs, and the couple enters a new stage in their lives. Partners often may not see themselves as “caregivers”, simply doing what they had expected to do, and this has implications on seeking services and support.

The demands of caregiving have various physical, mental, financial, and social effects, many of which can be detrimental to a caregiver’s own health. For example, caregivers have higher rates of depression and anxiety, as well as, lower life satisfaction. It is important for the

caregivers to remember to look after themselves as well.

Individual characteristics, such as personality and role identification within the relationship, can shape how caregivers experience their responsibilities.

Recognition that your loved one is getting personal, attentive, and individualized care is something to be proud of.

Caregiving changes how partners relate to one another. Frequently there is an introduction of people into the home (home health care workers, nurses, therapists, volunteers, etc.), which can alter the dynamics of the couple’s relationship.

When dealing with outsiders, perceived or actual differences in personal beliefs and how care should be provided can be problematic. In addition, caregiving may involve one partner assuming responsibility for unfamiliar tasks (such

as managing the finances or doing laundry). This can be challenging and cause disagreement at times, but the outcome is positive, as the individual has learned a new, important, and helpful skill.

The couple’s prior interpersonal patterns play a significant role in how caregiving affects the individual. In fact, caregivers who see themselves as part of a couple, with an identity tied to the relationship seem to weather the ups and downs of their new roles more satisfactorily.

The most successful caregiving seems to be a mix of having a sense of duty and obligation to care for your partner as well as doing so out of affection and love.

The best possible foundation includes taking care of your own needs as well as those of your partner.