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## **Caregiver burnout prevalent during the holiday season**

**(CITY – Date, 2007)** – *Oh by gosh, by golly, it's time for mistletoe and holly!* Holidays should be times for relaxation and joy, but sometimes they become overly stressful—creating tension and unhappy times—rather than anticipated enjoyment. December is National Stress-Free Holidays Month and **My Agency** has joined forces with that national movement to educate the public on the importance of caring for the caregiver to avoid burnout during the holidays.

### **Caregivers are especially susceptible to burnout during the holidays.**

Holiday stress increases symptoms of “caregiver burnout” which WebMD describes as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude—from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned. Burnout occurs when caregivers don't get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able—physically or financially. Caregivers who are "burned out" may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, and depression. Many caregivers feel guilty if they spend time on themselves instead of loved ones.

### **Signs of Burnout: A Checklist for Caregivers**

1. Are you curtailing visits and phone calls with close friends?
2. Have you given up hobbies or activities that you have enjoyed for years?
3. Are you developing stress-related problems such as back pain, headaches, chronic feelings of fatigue, and/or depression?

4. Are you coming down with colds, flu, and/or other illnesses more than usual?
5. Do you have a short temper? Do you find you're getting mad in the check-out line at the grocery store? In traffic? With friends and family?
6. Do you have outbursts of anger at your loved ones when they behave erratically or become difficult?
7. Have you gained or lost weight unintentionally?
8. Do you have an unshakable feeling of despair or pessimism?
9. Are you crying "for no reason" or over minor problems?
10. Do you complain about lack of sleep or chronic insomnia?

**M. Ross Seligson, Ph.D., P.A., a Licensed Psychologist, recommends these strategies to ward off or cope with burnout:**

- Participate in a support network
- Consult with professionals to explore burnout issues
- Attend a support group to receive feedback and coping strategies
- Vary the focus of caregiving responsibilities if possible (rotate responsibilities with family members)
- Exercise daily and maintain a healthy diet
- Establish "quiet time" for meditation
- Get a weekly massage
- Stay involved in hobbies

**Consider respite care.** Caregivers can take time off from caregiving to avoid symptoms of caregiver burnout and *enjoy* holiday shopping, parties, and baking. Respite provides caregivers with the break they need and ensures loved ones still receive the attention they deserve. Time required for respite varies from part of one day to routine relief for several weeks.

**The National Family Caregiver Support Program offers respite care.** The enactment of the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2000 (Public Law 106-501) established an important program, the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). Funds have been allocated to states to work in partnership with area agencies on aging and local and community service providers to put

into place multi-faceted systems of support for family caregivers. For more information on the NFCSP contact **MY COMPANY** or visit the Administration on Aging website at <http://www.aoa.gov/carenetwork>.

**Contact **MY COMPANY** for more information and respite care resources.**

Plus, **MY COMPANY** can provide assistance in other ways. Another pair of hands around during the holidays to prepare meals, shop, run errands, clean, or do laundry can make the difference in creating an enjoyable family time together.

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