

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Studies confirm that caregivers play host to a high level of compassion fatigue. Day in, day out, workers struggle to function in care giving environments that constantly present heart wrenching, emotional challenges. Affecting positive change in society, a mission so vital to those passionate about caring for others, is perceived as elusive, if not impossible. This painful reality, coupled with first-hand knowledge of society's flagrant disregard for the safety and well being of the feeble and frail, takes its toll on everyone from full time employees to part time volunteers. Eventually, negative attitudes prevail.

Compassion Fatigue symptoms are normal displays of chronic stress resulting from the care giving work we choose to do. Leading traumatologist Eric Gentry suggests that people who are attracted to care giving often enter the field already compassion fatigued. A strong identification with helpless, suffering, or traumatized people or animals is possibly the motive. It is common for such people to hail from a tradition of what Gentry labels: other-directed care giving. Simply put, these are people who were taught at an early age to care for the needs of others before caring for their own needs. Authentic, ongoing self-care practices are absent from their lives.

If you sense that you are suffering from compassion fatigue, chances are excellent that you are. Your path to wellness begins with one small step: awareness. A heightened awareness can lead to insights regarding past traumas and painful situations that are being relived over and over within the confines of your symptoms and behaviors. With the appropriate information and support, you can embark on a journey of discovery, healing past traumas and pain that currently serve as obstacles to a healthy, happier lifestyle.

Many resources are available to help you recognize the causes and symptoms of compassion fatigue. Healing begins by employing such simple practices as regular exercise, healthy eating habits, enjoyable social activities, journaling, and restful sleep. Hopefully, the information on this website will be of use to you and help you jump-start your process.

Accepting the presence of compassion fatigue in your life only serves to validate the fact that you are a deeply caring individual. Somewhere along your healing path, the truth will present itself: You don't have to make a choice. It is possible to practice healthy, ongoing self-care while successfully continuing to care for others.

The Path to Wellness

Once you realize that you are a candidate for compassion fatigue, or are already suffering its effects, exploring this new awareness can lead to insights concerning past traumas, pain, and defeating behaviors. A common and understandable coping mechanism in care giving is to simply stuff the overwhelming emotions that surface repeatedly in your work. How else can you keep going? Eventually, those emotions refuse to be

ignored. All too often, psychological and physical crisis occurs.

With support, insightful information, and authentic self-care, you can begin to understand the complexity of the emotions you've been juggling and, most likely, suppressing. Most people never take the time to understand how their jobs affect them emotionally. Give yourself credit for moving forward and affecting change. Your hard work will pay off.

Authentic Self Care Begins With the Following:

- Be kind to yourself.
- Enhance your awareness with education.
- Accept where you are on your path at all times.
- Understand that those close to you may not be there when you need them most.
- Exchange information and feelings with people who can validate you.
- Listen to others who are suffering.
- Clarify your personal boundaries. What works for you; what doesn't.
- Express your needs verbally.
- Take positive action to change your environment.

Your Continuing Journey...

Healing the symptoms of compassion fatigue is an inside job. You've been loyal to your self-care plan, clarified personal boundaries in both your personal and professional life, and now understand your negative behaviors and their origins. As you continue to do the necessary internal work, you will reap the benefits. Your life will begin to change for the better.

In order to move forward on your path to wellness, you must continually commit to authentic self-care that includes:

- Health-building activities such as exercise, massage, yoga, meditation.
- Eating healthy foods

- Drinking plenty of water
- Use natural healing products to care for and heal your body
- Practicing the art of self-management. Just say no
- Developing a healthy support system: people who contribute to your self esteem, people who listen well, people who care
- Organizing your life so you become proactive as opposed to reactive
- Reserving your life energy for worthy causes. Choose your battles.
- Living a balanced life: Sing, dance, sit with silence

Are you suffering from Compassion Fatigue? Life Stress?

Denial is one of the most detrimental symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and Life Stress. It can easily hinder your ability to assess the level of fatigue and stress in your life as well as thwart your efforts to begin the healing process.

The following two tests were designed to help you recognize symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and Life Stress in your life. While they will never replace a qualified medical diagnosis, they may help you determine if you need to seek further assistance.

<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/pages/lifestress.html>