

Carers, Families and Loved Ones

Carer Fatigue

A 'carer' is anyone supporting an individual with an eating disorder. A parent, sibling, partner, best friend, grandparent, health professional, school counsellor, chaplain or other significant person.

Compassion fatigue can be **defined** as the gradual lessening of compassion over time. It can be caused by emotional and/ or physical toll placed on a carer as a result of caring for a loved one with an eating disorder (Hall, L. 2017). The prolonged exposure from listening and caring for a loved one living with an eating disorder can make a carer susceptible to compassion fatigue and is not always easily identifiable (Transitional Support, n.d).



What Leads to Carer Fatigue?

- Long term support of someone living with an eating disorder
- Inadequate support system and/or lack of connection with informed others
- Insufficient resources, misinformation, or lack of understanding about the causes and symptoms of your loved one's eating disorder and the treatment plan for their care
- Feeling overly responsible for every up and down in the process of your loved one's recovery
- Placing too high an expectation on what is possible for you in your role as a support person
- Uncertainty about how to manage your emotions in general, but specifically in situations in which you might feel scared, overwhelmed, or have a lack of control
- Lack of attention to basics of self-care such as rest, exercise, and proper nutrition
- The ongoing fear, shame and self-blame cycle

Carer Fatigue Indicators

- Having difficulty maintaining an empathetic perspective, or seeing your loved one as manipulative, uncaring, or selfish
- Misattributing the eating disorder symptoms to something negative about your loved one's behaviour, such as feeling like your loved one is "doing this on purpose" or "doing it to you" or "just wants attention"
- Feeling perpetually tired, withdrawn, hopeless or having a desire to give up or give in to the eating disorder
- Feeling angry and irritable and having difficult managing your own emotions
- "The family unit or dynamic can be challenged and changed" - Marc Bryant (episode 3)

How to Reduce Carer Fatigue



Hope

Hold hope that full recovery from an eating disorder is possible. Know that, your involvement as a carer, advocate, ally and supporter for your loved one is essential in supporting their recovery.



Compassion

Try to be kind to yourself as you learn to navigate this difficult role better and better over time. Increase your support by seeking your own therapy or support group.



Acceptance

Understanding and working towards acceptance does not mean that you have to like, want or agree with the situation. Acceptance is the process of accepting the reality of the situation. Ways to do this are to start to reduce your attachment to previous expectations, e.g. "what you thought your loved one would do." When you face these realities directly, you reduce the struggle of wanting things to be different in this moment.



Celebrate

Setting realistic expectations and celebrate even the small wins. Maybe your loved one was willing to try a challenge food, or able to use a set of skills. While these things might seem too small to celebrate, they are the building blocks towards recovery and should be recognised as such.



Reduce Perfectionistic Thinking

Try to reduce the pressure for yourself to know how to handle every situation or have the right response. Recognise your own humanity and know that you are trying your best and will sometimes make mistakes.



Relationships

Enjoy the relationship you have with your loved one. It is important to make time to connect with your loved one and nurture your relationship without the entire focus being on the eating disorder.



Get Involved

Involvement in treatment and collaboration is important. Consider family therapy sessions and/or having more contact with your loved one's therapist or treatment team.

Source: <https://www.eatingrecoverycenter.com/families/portal/resource-center/compassion-fatigue-parents-of-children-with-eating-disorders>

Marc's take-home message

Marc's Story - was a primary and co-carer for his daughter for six years with an eating disorder, who is now in recovery.

- Externalise
 - Recognise what the eating disorder looks like
 - Separate the eating disorder from your loved one
- Keep your hope alive
 - It may look like there is no change, but there is.
- Building resistance is important
- Schedule in time for self-care
 - Have regular planned activity for yourself that has nothing to do with the eating disorder
- Remember: Recovery is possible
- Don't put a timeline expectation on recovery
- Thoughts of guilt can creep in, but are not valid
 - It's no ones fault
- You're doing a great job! Simply being there and stepping up to the carer role is a wonderful thing
- The oxygen mask metaphor - put your own mask first (self-care) before helping a loved one
- You should be proud to be a carer, regardless of how you feel you are doing



Check out our Vodcast Episode 3 for more information on Carer Fatigue with EDQ Manager Belinda, and Carer, Marc. Available on the EDQ website and YouTube channel. While you're there, check out our previous Vodcast episodes. Be sure to give the video a like and subscribe to our channel.

Carer Support at EDQ

- **Carer Peer Mentor Program** - connecting QLD carers to be mentored by other carers who have supported a love one in their recovery. All carer mentors are extensively trained to provide non-clinical, additional support.
- **Carer Connect** - monthly support group that provides a safe space to share your experience, build skills and an opportunity for self-care.
- **Individual Coaching** - free over the phone, email or face to face coaching for individual carers and/or families. This is to help you develop an understanding of eating disorders and ways in which you can support your loved one.
- **Fostering Recovery** - a 1 day skills based training workshop based on the work of Professor Janet Treasure. It aims to help QLD carers understand more about eating disorders and ways to support recovery. Including; how to make meal times less stressful, develop positive coping strategies and communication skills, and foster a healthier relationship with your loved one.

If you are interested in any of the above support services, contact EDQ on (07) 3844 6055 or admin@edq.org.au



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Eating Disorders Queensland

Carers, Families and Loved Ones - Supporting you to support your loved one

www.eatingdisordersqueensland.org.au
89 Sherwood Rd, Toowong, QLD 4066

admin@edq.org.au
(07) 3844 6055