

# Mental Health

**The Stress of Caring**  
A Journey to Self-Care



Asian American Health Initiative  
Montgomery County  
Department of Health and Human Services

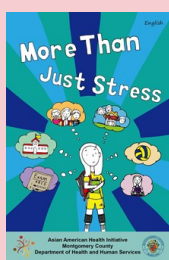
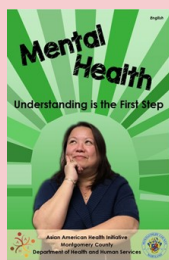


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The Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) has developed multiple volumes of photonovels to address different mental health challenges faced by the Asian American population.

These photonovels are available in English, Chinese, Hindi, Korean and Vietnamese. Visit the **Asian American Health Initiative's Resource Library** to access these photonovels at: [www.AAHInfo.org/aahi-resources/](http://www.AAHInfo.org/aahi-resources/)



Download a Microsoft Publisher version of any of our photonovels in any language and create your own photonovel just for your community. Need help creating your own? Give us a call at **240-777-4517**.

## MAIN CHARACTERS



Lee  
Brother



Lana  
Sister

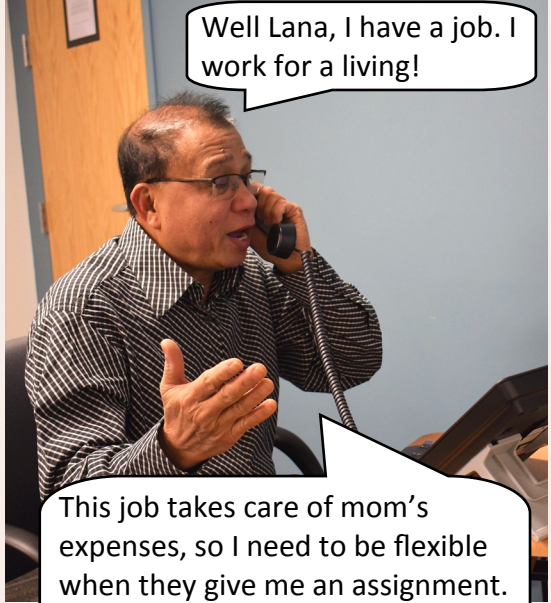


Kia  
Lee's wife

Lee and Lana share the responsibility of taking care of their aging mom since their dad unexpectedly passed away two years ago. They have struggled to meet the sudden demands of their mom's health, while balancing work and their own families. It is especially challenging when an unexpected responsibility comes up, as is often the case with Lee's job. He just learned of an urgent work-related travel and calls to see if Lana can take care of their mom over the weekend.



Again, Lee? You just had something urgent last week. You know I have responsibilities too, right?



Well Lana, I have a job. I work for a living!

This job takes care of mom's expenses, so I need to be flexible when they give me an assignment. When they ask me to attend a meeting, I have to attend it.

I also contribute towards taking care of Mom, Lee.



It's just... Sean has back to back appointments this weekend that I must take him to.

Why can't she just help me out? I don't mind taking on the financial responsibility of caring for Mom, but I wish Lana could be supportive.



We all have a lot going on Lana and this isn't a huge request. She just needs to stay at your place. Why do you always make it about you?

Here I am, yet again, scrambling to take care of everything and everyone. Why can't Lee understand that managing Mom and a child with special needs is really tough?

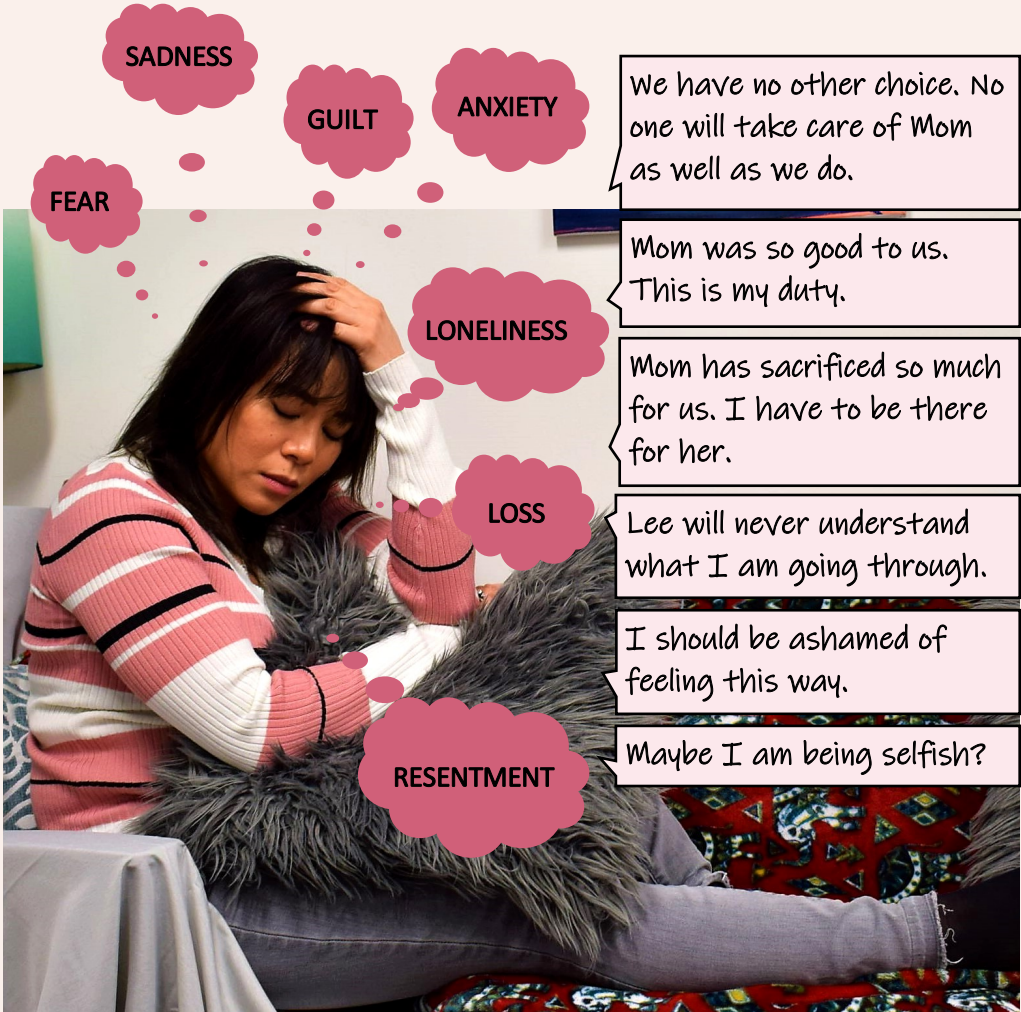


I am not making it about me! You always ask me to do things last minute. Either way, it sounds like there are no other options. Just drop her off tomorrow after work.



Turn to page 16 to learn more about family caregivers.

Juggling to meet the needs of her son and provide care to her mom was taking a toll on Lana's health. Lately, she feels like she has no energy. In the past, Lana suggested she and Lee use outside help to take care of their mom. However, they knew their relatives would label them as too "Americanized". As their mom's dementia progressed, so did the demand for constant care. Frustrated and overwhelmed by guilt, Lana fell asleep on the couch. When she wakes up, her mind is racing with thoughts.



Turn to page 16 to learn more about the stigma associated with the use of formal services in the Asian American community.

During his meeting, Lee tries to forget about all the tasks he has to take care of back home and tries to get some work done, but he has a hard time concentrating.



Mom's insulin pick-up on Tuesday.

Evening work meeting on Wednesday.

**LEE**  
MMS  
10:32 AM  
Lana can you take Mom to her physical therapy appointment on Friday?

**LEE**  
MMS  
11:00 AM  
Lana did you receive my messages?

**LANA**  
MMS  
11:05 AM  
Lee, I have a consultation with Sean's physician on Friday. I am not sure if I can take Mom...

**LEE**  
MMS  
11:06 AM  
Well, figure it out Lana. This is the least you could do to help.

**LANA**  
MMS  
11:09AM  
That was very unnecessary, Lee. You are really not being fair to me lately.

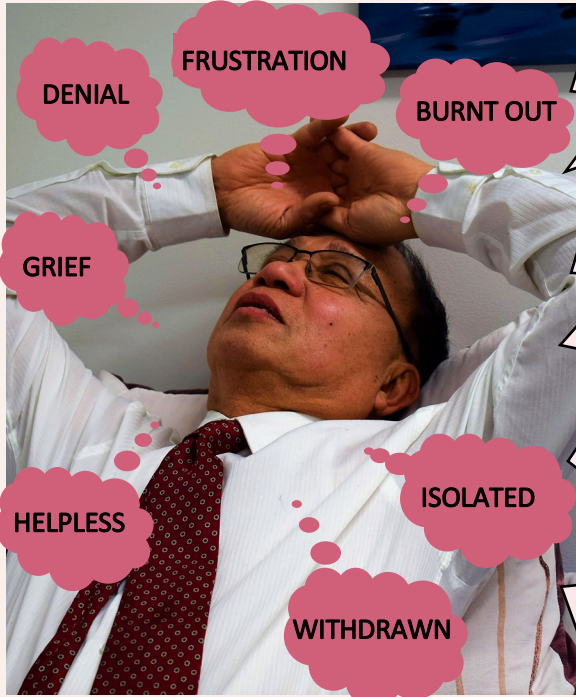


This pressure is too much.

I am so tired of this!

Why is Lee so bitter?

Even after returning home from his work, Lee is unable to stop thinking about all the things he has to get done. His wife, Kia, notices that Lee seems even more stressed than usual. Recently, she has noticed changes in his appetite and constantly finds him lying awake at night, staring at the ceiling, unable to fall asleep. Today in particular, Kia feels like there is something that is deeply bothering Lee and knows it was time to talk to him.



**DENIAL**

**FRUSTRATION**

**BURNT OUT**

**GRIEF**

**HELPLESS**

**ISOLATED**

**WITHDRAWN**

I wish Lana would do more to help out with Mom.

All these project deadlines!

Need to pay Mom's medical bill by end of this month.

I need to be strong for the family while we care for Mom.

I wish I knew how to take better care of Mom's health.

None of my friends or relatives ever talk about their challenges when taking care of their family. Am I the only one feeling this way?



Hi Lee, how was your trip?

It was fine.



Is there something bothering you?

What do you mean?

I find you constantly worried about everything. You have frequent headaches. You are not your usual self Lee. I am a little worried.

Well, taking care of Mom has not been easy, you know that.

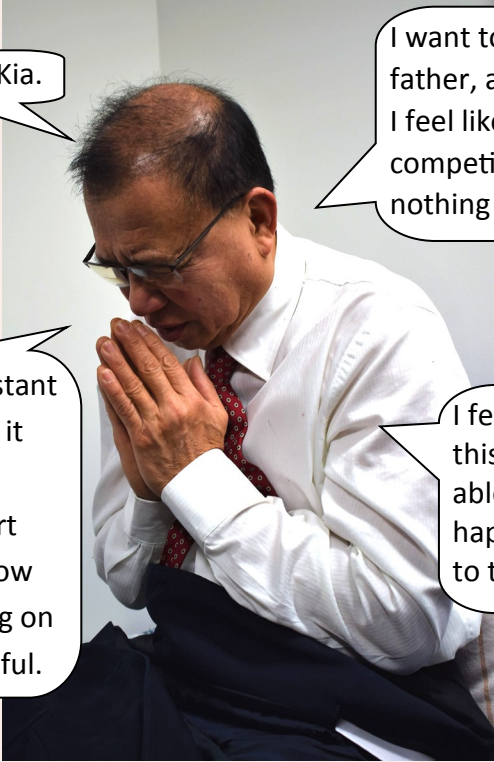
I know, but recently things that did not use to bother you much, seem to bother you a lot.



I...

I am afraid to even say anything because I fear that something I say may make you mad.






I am so sorry, Kia.

I want to be a good son, father, and husband, but I feel like I have so many competing priorities that nothing I do is enough.

There is this constant pressure to keep it together. I can't afford to fall apart right now, and now that I'm reflecting on it, it is really painful.

I feel guilty for feeling this way. I should be able to keep my family happy. I should be able to take care of Mom.




Oh, Lee. I see you giving your best everyday to take care of the family.

Right now, I don't even have time to think of me.

But, how can you take care of Mom if you do not take care of yourself?




Turn to page 16 to learn more on how caregiver stress affects mental and physical health.



My cousin went through a similar situation. She attended a caregiver support group, and it really helped her cope. Maybe this is something we could try?

I am not so sure Kia...



Maybe even I can go along with you sometimes. I could also learn ways to better support you!

That would be nice. We haven't had chance to spend much time together, so this would give us the opportunity to be together.



Turn to page 16 to learn more on why it is important to ask for help when caring for a loved one.

You are not in this alone, Lee. You have me and you have Lana. Even if you don't always agree with everything, you both care and want the best for Mom.

There is no loss in trying Lee.

Let me think about it, Kia. It is a lot to take in right now...

After thinking about it for few weeks, Lee along with Kia, started attending a caregiver support group. Lee learned that caregiver stress is common and to combat it, it is important to form a supportive team with open and effective communication. This also helped him improve his relationship with Kia. He began to understand how ignoring the stress of caregiving can negatively impact physical and mental health. He realized then that it was not only impacting him but his sister as well and he owed her an apology.



Turn to page 16 to learn more on the causes of caregiver stress.

Lana, I have not been fair to you for a while now. It has been difficult with balancing work and taking care of Mom. I took it out on you, and I am sorry.

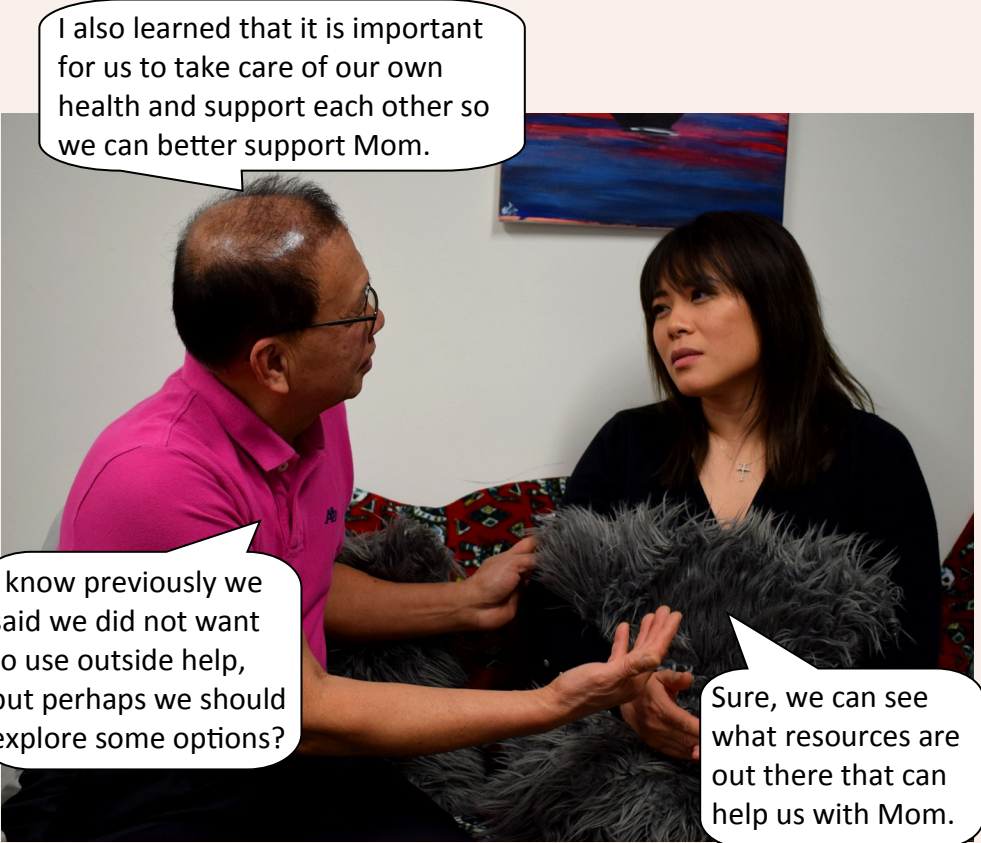
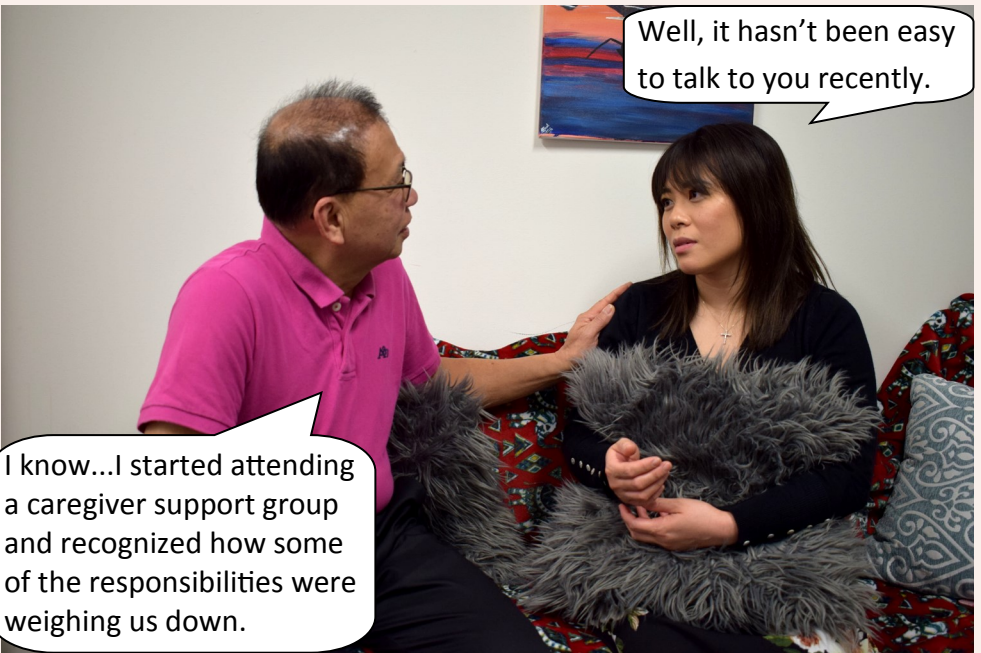



It's okay. I understand it's a lot. I also feel like I'm juggling a million things. Between an aging parent, a demanding job, and caring for a special need's child, I never feel like there's enough time in the day.

It's also tough watching Mom's health decline. I lost my best friend, and I feel a little lost too.




Wow, I never realized you were going through this Lana.





Maybe being able to talk to others may help reduce your own stress too?

I am not sure if we should share our problems with strangers. I don't know if anyone will understand our culture and responsibilities.



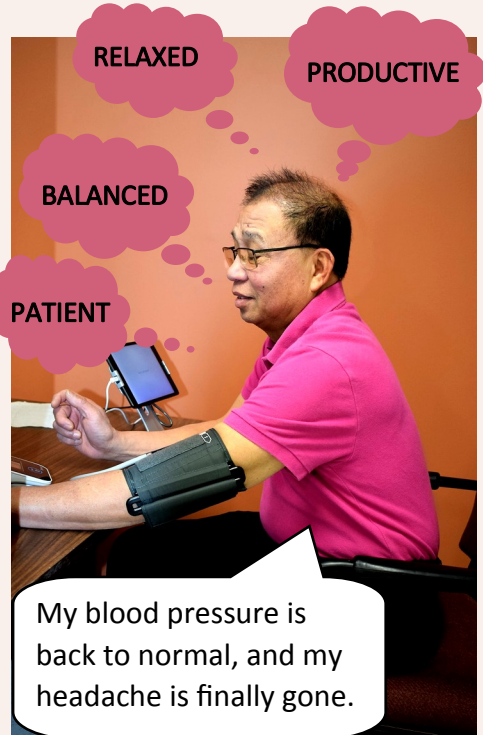
You wouldn't know until you try...

That is true...

The stress of caring is demanding Lana, but we will get through this together.

I am glad we are having this conversation, Lee. It feels good to finally be able to share my feelings with someone who won't judge me for feeling stressed. Thank you.

Lana was amazed at how therapeutic it was to attend caregiver support groups. From her group, she learned about the importance of self-care. Since taking some time out for herself every day, she has noticed improvements to her stress, anxiety, and mood. To help manage their individual demands, Lana, Lee, and their spouses hold monthly family meetings and have developed a caregiving plan. It is an ongoing journey, but they are hopeful that the respite care service they are using will give them the opportunity to focus more on their own health and well-being.

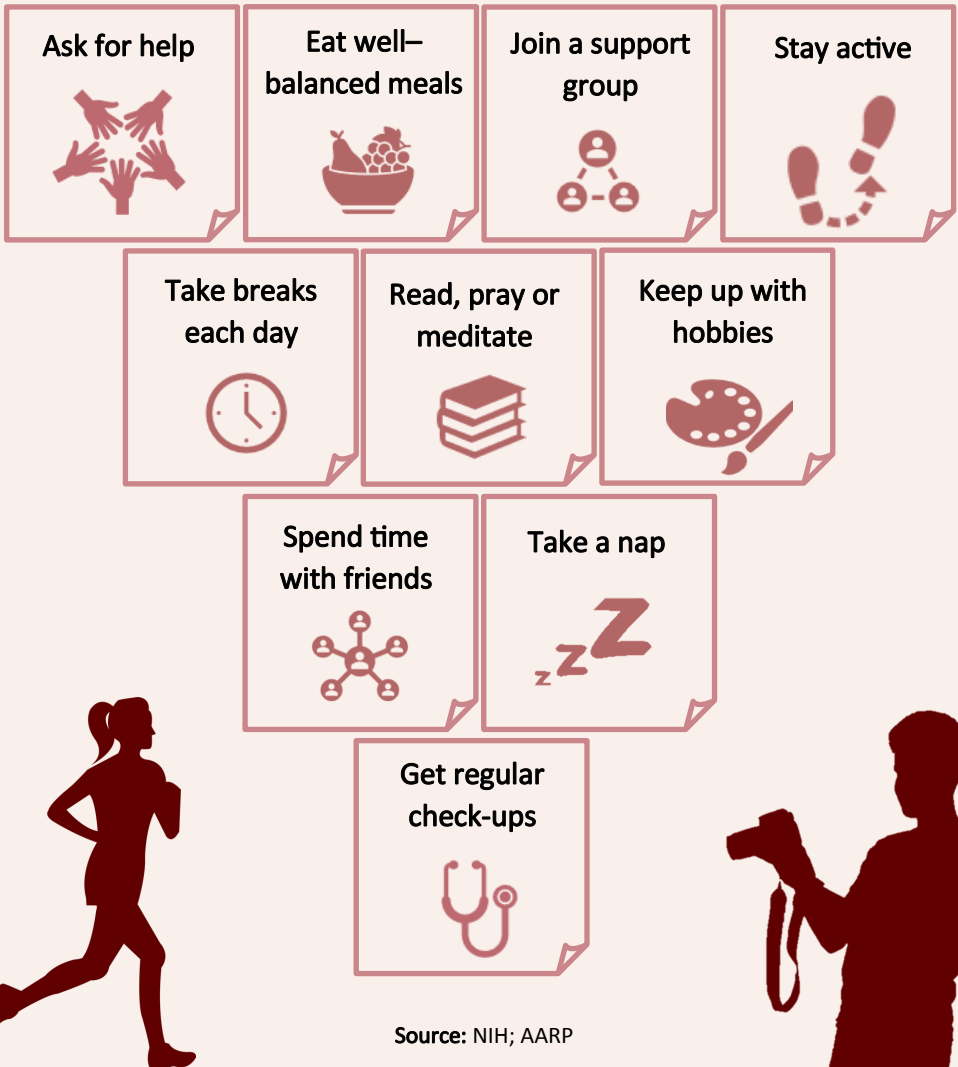


## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CAREGIVER STRESS

- ◆ Feeling overwhelmed
- ◆ Feeling alone, isolated, or deserted by others
- ◆ Sleeping too much or too little
- ◆ Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- ◆ Feeling tired most of the time
- ◆ Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- ◆ Becoming easily irritated or angered
- ◆ Feeling worried or sad
- ◆ Having headache or body aches

# WAYS TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE

It can be difficult to find time for yourself while caring for a loved one but taking breaks to stay active and socially engaged can help you maintain your health and continue delivering the best care.



Source: NIH; AARP

There are linguistically and culturally sensitive mental health providers available to the Asian American community. For more information, please contact the **Asian American Health Initiative** at **240-777-4517**.



## DID YOU KNOW?



Families often do not think through who becomes the primary caregiver and what supporting roles other family members will play. Caregiving may start when the sibling who lives nearby or has a close relationship with the parent helps with small tasks. You may not even identify yourself as a caregiver at first, but then find yourself overwhelmed and feeling resentful of your siblings as your parent requires more help.

**Source:** National Institute on Aging, NIH

Caregiver stress is caused due to the emotional and physical strain of caregiving. Sometimes, this means there is little time for work, other family members, friends and even your own self. Research indicates that caregiving also demands a significant emotional, physical, and financial toll.

**Source:** Office on Women's Health; Administration for Community Living

Although a wide range of supportive care services are available for caregivers and their loved ones, in some Asian American cultures, cultural taboos and stigmas associated with use of formal services often limits access to these services.

**Source:** Miyawaki, Christina; Pharr, Jennifer et al.; Meyer et al.

Some of the ways stress affects caregivers include anger, depression and anxiety, a weak immune system, obesity, a higher risk for chronic diseases, problems with short-term memory or paying attention, exhaustion, irritability, and social withdrawal.

**Source:** Office on Women's Health; Alzheimer's Association

Taking care of yourself both physically and mentally is one of the most important things you can do as a caregiver. This could mean asking family members and friends to help out, doing things you enjoy or getting help from a home health care service. Taking these actions can bring you some relief and you often return to your responsibilities renewed, better able to provide care for your loved ones.

**Source:** National Institute on Aging; AARP Family Caregiving

# Montgomery County's Aging and Disability Resource Unit

## Services

- Resources for family caregivers
- Montgomery County's caregiver online newsletter and blog
- Caregiving & dementia education video series
- Helpful programs, organizations and websites for seniors
- Transportation
- In-home care
- Specialized information and referral
- Skill-based trainings

## Location

401 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

Monday - Friday  
8:30 am - 5:00 pm  
Tuesday - Thursday  
8:30 am - 7:30 pm

**240-777-3000**



**Bilingual staff and translator services  
are available.**

In Montgomery County there are helpful supports available for caregivers. All caregivers benefit through practical guidance, emotional support and as needed, connection with skilled providers. For more information visit:  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/caregiver.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/caregiver.html)

## **Alzheimer's Association (National Capital Area Chapter)**

**1-800-272-3900**

Provides numerous non-cost programs, website information, and a 24/7 helpline. Interpretation services are available in over 200 languages.

Local assistance includes:

- Caregiver support groups
- Memory's Cafe
- Transportation
- Education programs
- Care consultations

For more information visit:

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

## **The ARC Montgomery County Respite Care**

**301-984-5777**

Provides access to supervised short-term home care allowing unpaid caregivers time for errands, appointments and selfcare. Families can choose from many respite care venues including:

- Family home
- Adult medical day programs
- Approved respite facilities

For more information visit:

[www.thearcmontgomerycounty.org](http://www.thearcmontgomerycounty.org)

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## Photonovel Actors:

**Lee** - Antonio M. Calaro

**Lana** - Jeneffer Estampador Haynes

**Kia** - Denia Calaro

## Special Thanks to:

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### Disclaimer

*The characters, places, and incidents depicted in this photonovel are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is entirely coincidental.*



## Asian American Health Initiative

Together To Build A Healthy Community



### **Asian American Health Initiative**

Montgomery County

Department of Health and Human Services

1401 Rockville Pike, 3rd Floor

Rockville, MD 20852

Tel: 240-777-4517

Fax: 240-777-4564

Website: [www.AAHInfo.org](http://www.AAHInfo.org)

Email: [info@AAHInfo.org](mailto:info@AAHInfo.org)