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Is it Possible to Care Too Much?

Understanding How to Care Without It Becoming a Source of Your Stress

Our need to feel loved and cared for and to give love and care to others seems to be an innate human quality programmed into our DNA. Feeling loved and cared for gives us a feeling of security and self-worth. Caring for someone else gives us a sense of wholeness — it's an extension of our love. As good as it feels to care for someone or something, for many people it can also become a source of stress and emotional chaos that leaves them feeling mentally and emotionally drained. Which arises the question, is it possible to care too much?

In most dictionaries the first definition of care is a burdened state of mind; worry; concern. It takes several lines before some dictionaries get around to defining care as “to feel love for, to look after, provide for, attend to.” Many people feel that if they're not worrying or obsessing over things it must mean that they're not caring enough. This need to worry or obsess is an "emotional habit" that operates under the seemingly healthy guise of attention, sentiment and sympathy toward people or situations, but often can end up causing disharmony, depression and a spiral of destructive stress.

Psychologist Deborah Rozman, co-author of [Transforming Anxiety: The HeartMath Solution for Overcoming Fear and Worry and Creating Serenity](#), says, “Emotional habits keep people locked into a loop of anxiety and even depression. One of the habits most of us can relate to is called ‘overcare.’ Overcare is a common emotional habit that causes us anxiety, worry and stress.”

The term “overcare” was coined by Doc Childre, founder of the HeartMath® system and co-author of numerous books, including *Transforming Stress*, *Transforming Anxiety*, *Transforming Anger*, and *Transforming Depression*. [Doc describes overcare](#) as that which happens when the mind and emotions cross the line of balanced care and get too attached to and bogged down with whomever or whatever you're caring about. Once you become too entangled in another's web and realize your energy is drained from overcare and over-attachment, it's easy to be seduced into blaming and resenting the people or issues you care about.

Examples of overcare:

- A mother who equates love with constant worry and fret about her children.
- A citizen concerned about those affected by a natural disaster becomes inflamed and judgmental towards government or public agencies' actions.
- A spouse who wants to reassure their partner that they love them ends up stifling their partner with attention.
- An employee fearful of possible layoffs feeds his anxiety with constant negative projections and assumptions about the future.
- A son's concern for his elderly father leads to continuous arguments with his siblings about how to best care for their father.

In all of these examples, what starts out as a genuine and balanced intention to care gets muddled with over-attachment and over-identity and leads to overcare for the person or situation. The original caring intentions instead become emotionally draining to all parties and often can create a negative effect.

Examples of the effects of overcare:

- The mother's children feel suffocated and distance themselves from her.
- The concerned citizen drains personal energy by harboring these judgments, and her resentment toward the system prevents her from taking a proactive approach to helping the people affected.
- The smothered spouse craves personal space and the couple separates or even divorces.
- The employee's constant anxiety prevents him from sleeping and jacks up his blood pressure, while his assumptions fuel rumors among colleagues, creating a toxic environment of angst and stress.
- The family's arguments put even more strain on them, making it more difficult to come to a family consensus, and causes the father to feel that he has become a burden.

Examples like these are all too common and happen more than we realize. It's not that we care too much, but more that we don't know how to manage our care. We think that somehow if we anguish over something enough we'll get a creative solution or we'll somehow conjure up the productive motivation we need to take action and resolve something. Worry and anxiety do not solve problems. It is when we finally release the worry, decide to sleep on it, or talk with a friend who helps us let the worry go that the answers finally come to us.

Dr. Rozman says, "Balanced care is not some placid state that lacks drive and passion. It's quite the opposite, actually. Balanced care is dynamic, it is a place in your heart that allows you to flex through stress and stay resilient under pressure."

Wendy Warner, MD, Founder and Medical Director of [Medicine in Balance, LLC](#) and President of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine, says: "Overcare is often disguised as angst, worry, concern, sympathy, or even sentiment, and can lead to stress-related health issues such as headaches, backaches, high blood pressure, digestive issues, and hormonal imbalances. Although both men and women can experience overcare and related physical complaints, our society tends to 'train' and expect women to be caregivers, so they tend to be more prone to overcaring about people or situations."

As we learn to recognize when we're starting to get over-identified, over-attached, over-expectant or overzealous, we become more sensitive to our own inner signals. This sensitivity allows us to make internal adjustments and get back to that balanced place inside where the original care started.

Personal Evaluation

Dr. Rozman suggests trying this personal evaluation: "Listen to and watch your feelings as you consider these questions. Notice any changes in your feelings as you answer the questions."

- In what areas is care adding to your energy and reducing your stress? Why?
- In what areas is care draining your energy and giving you stress? What do you overcare about in the situation?
- Are you over-identified with someone or some issue?
- Are you over-attached to a particular outcome?
- Which of the common masks of overcare – sentiment, attachment, expectation, or sympathy – best describe what you experience?

Rozman says, "This evaluation will help you recognize where you have overcare. The first step to getting back to your balanced care is knowing when you've crossed over into a state of overcare."

In their book *Transforming Anxiety*, Deborah Rozman and Doc Childre provide tools and techniques that will show you how to release the anxiety and worry associated with emotional habits like overcare. Letting go of the overcare will give you the inner security and strength you need to get back to the balanced care where you can tap into your creativity and passion.

Tools to Ease Your Overcare

The following tools from HeartMath are designed to help ease out any stressful emotions and the emotional drain that result from overcare.

Notice and Ease™

In order to shift out of overcare you first need to identify what you're feeling. By slowing down the emotional energy running through your system, you're better able to identify whether it's worry, anxiety, hurt, etc.

1. Notice and admit what you're feeling.
2. Try to name the feeling.
3. Tell yourself to e-a-s-e – as you gently focus your attention in the area of your heart, relax as you breathe, and e-a-s-e the stress out.

Attitude Breathing®

Attitude Breathing is a tool to help you shift out of an emotional draining state and back to a balance state of care. By practicing this you will learn to clear and replace the overcare with a more balance and positive emotion and gain a more intelligent perspective.

1. Recognize an unwanted attitude: a feeling or attitude that you want to change. This could be overcare, anxiety, self-judgment, guilt, anger, anything.
2. Identify and breathe a replacement attitude: Select a positive attitude, then breathe the feeling of that new attitude slowly and casually through your heart area. Do this for a while to anchor the new feeling.

Based on 17 years of research, HeartMath has also developed unique technologies that give you objective feedback by measuring your heart rhythms. Using tools such as the *Notice and Ease* and *Attitude Breathing* in conjunction with the [emWave Personal Stress Reliever®](#) or the [emWave® PC Stress Relief System](#) will give you the added benefit of real-time feedback - helping to quickly guide you back to a balanced mental and emotional state.

Free Resources

HeartMath offers a number of free resources that can help you release the stress and anxiety of overcare and get back to a balanced care.

- [Stress Survey](#): a free survey tool designed to help you understand how various aspects of your life impact your levels of stress and well-being.
- [Personal Tracker](#): a free web application to track five important aspects of well-being.
- [Webinar downloads](#) on topics like transforming stress and anxiety.
- Register for [upcoming webinars](#) on various topics related to mental and emotional well-being.

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between emotions, heart function, and cognitive performance. HeartMath's work has been published in numerous peer-reviewed journals such as American Journal of Cardiology, Stress Medicine, and Preventive Cardiology, as well as business journals such as Harvard Business Review and Leadership Excellence. HeartMath's organizational clients include Mayo Health System, NASA, BP, Duke University Health System, Stanford Business School, Redken, Kaiser Permanente, Boeing, and Cisco Systems, as well as dozens of school systems and thousands of health professionals around the world. To learn more about HeartMath, go to www.heartmath.com.