

Caring for the Caregiver

What You Can Do to Help Yourself

The cancer experience affects not only the patient but those who care for the person as well. Often a trusted family member, companion or friend assists along the way. These caregivers are important in the patient's care. Without them, a patient may feel alone.

You may be a caregiver if:

- You live with the patient and help with daily activities.
- You are a neighbor or friend who may run errands, cook meals or help with daily activities.
- You are a long distance away, but continue to offer support. You may stay connected with phone calls, emails and text messages.

As a caregiver, your feelings will reflect the situation. There may be satisfaction from helping or sadness and frustration over challenges. Many people feel a loss of control, increased responsibility and financial and time pressures. These emotions are normal and can be overwhelming at times. There are ways to cope.

Acknowledge and Express Your Feelings

Some caregivers find it helpful to journal, talk to a trusted friend or family member, engage in relaxation or meditation practices or seek counseling.

Take Care of Your Physical Needs

Remember to breathe, eat healthy, exercise, rest, keep up with your own medical appointments and laugh.

Set Realistic Goals

Being a caregiver is demanding. Set realistic goals. Recognize what you can and cannot do. Prioritize your goals and follow through with them. You need breaks, too. Be flexible and make changes if necessary.

Ask for Help

Allow others to help: family, friends, clergy, counselors or a support group. Often people want to help, but do not know what to do. Make a task list and have it ready when someone offers to help. Your task list may contain items such as run errands, prepare meals, do housework, pay bills, take your loved one to an appointment or caring for children after school.

Communicate with Your Family and Friends

Let people know how you feel. Visits with friends and family may help you feel less alone. Schedule an occasional meeting with others to help them understand the situation. Ask them to share in the care responsibilities.

Use Community Resources

Consider using in-home provider care services or adult day care. Some of these services help with cooking, cleaning, bathing, feeding, dressing, using the bathroom and lifting and moving your loved one. Your social worker can help you find these resources.

Seek Information and Keep Communication Open

Ask questions of your care team. The better you understand the situation, the more informed choices you can make.

Department of Social Work

Clinical social workers provide short-term counseling free of charge. The department of social work can help with advance care planning, medical powers of attorney, living wills and community resources.

National Resources

The Caregiver Action Network can be reached at 800.896.3650 or at caregiveraction.org.

The Family Caregiver Alliance can be reached at 800.445.8106 or at caregiver.org.

The Well Spouse Association can be reached at wellspouse.org.