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PDF generated on July 24, 2016 from <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/caring-loved-one/tips-caregiving>

Tips for Caregiving [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 04/2015

Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Tips on Caregiving](#) [3], adapted from this content.

Key Messages:

- Caregiving often involves different types of support and tasks, which can be overwhelming.
- There are several ways to help manage all the duties of a caregiver to help you provide effective care.

Suggestions for being an effective caregiver

Caring for a person with cancer may seem complex and like too much to cope with at first. Depending on the person's needs, you may provide different types of support, such as:

- Emotional support
- Help with medical care
- Assist with financial and insurance issues
- Serve as the communicator between the patient and the health care team

You may find the following tips can help you become a successful caregiver:

[Remember that caregiving is a team effort](#) [4]. A caregiver is a member of an important team of family members, friends, volunteers, and the health care team. Each member of the team offers different skills and strengths to provide effective care.

If you are the main caregiver, help each team member express concerns, opinions, and emotions. Also, make sure that the person with cancer has a central role in all discussions and

decisions, if possible. It is very important for the person with cancer to feel like an active member in their care.

CancerCare provides a special website for caregivers called [My Cancer Circle](#) [5]. This website can help caregivers organize the family and friends who want to help. Find other [online communities for support](#) [6].

Create a list of tasks. Caregiving, like any responsibility, involves tasks of varying importance. Start by making a list of all of your caregiving tasks. Then, use it to decide how to divide the tasks between friends, family, professionals, and other volunteers.

Be proactive. Being proactive means taking charge and planning as much as possible to prevent last-minute emergencies. This can also help provide a sense of control and order. Create schedules that list which relative, friend, or other volunteer is available when and for what tasks. Make sure that all of the caregivers involved have some time to be away without [feeling guilty or concerned](#) [7]. Long-distance caregiving takes even more planning. Find out more about [how to be an effective long-distance caregiver](#) [8].

Be a problem solver. To be a good problem solver, identify problems, find out what is needed, and follow through. Do not be afraid to seek advice and help from others. Look for creative solutions that work for you and the person you care for.

Try to stay positive. Having a positive attitude can help set the tone for all that you do. You may not have control of what happens to you, but you can change how you react. To help you cope, talk with other members of the caregiving team. You may also wish to talk with friends, religious or spiritual advisors, [counselors](#) [9], and health care professionals.

Know yourself. Recognize your own strengths and weaknesses as a caregiver. This allows you to set boundaries and know when to ask for help. Setting limits can help you and the person you care for. The person you care for can exercise some independence, while you get a break. It is important to recognize when you need a break so you don't feel burned out. Read more about [how caregivers can take care of themselves](#) [10].

Consider professional and volunteer services. These services include professional home care, home-delivered meals, and help with everyday activities. Some community agencies have volunteers who can help with transportation or advocate for health insurance or other benefits. A local hospital or community [social worker](#) [11] is a great source for referrals to programs in your community. Learn more about [different caregiving options](#) [12].

Caring for the emotional well-being of the person with cancer

It's important to help the person you care for maintain a sense of control. A cancer diagnosis may make him or her feel little control over life. A simple step would be to ask if you can help with a specific task or decision instead of doing it on your own.

Communicate. One of the caregiver's most important jobs is to communicate openly with the person who has cancer. Choose a time that is convenient for both of you to talk. Provide assurance that he or she will be a central part of all discussions and decisions. Be open to the person's feelings and opinions and allow enough time to fully explain your feelings.

Accept the limitations of a person who is seriously ill. A person who just received chemotherapy may not be able to taste a meal you worked hard to prepare. Or, a person on pain medication may not notice all of the small things you do. Also, be aware that caregiving tasks may change as the person's health changes.

Include the person with cancer in activities that provide meaning or pleasure. Even if the person with cancer is no longer able to actively participate in activities he or she enjoys, look for other ways to encourage involvement. It is important to help the person stay connected to the world beyond the cancer and to maintain a sense of normalcy.

Participating in medical and physical care

Gather details about the patient's diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis, which is the chance of recovery. As a caregiver, learn more about cancer, including the patient's [type of cancer](#) [13]. Many [patient advocacy groups](#) [14] also can provide information related to specific cancers. Ask the doctor about other trusted resources. In addition, you may want to keep a record of medical appointments, test results, medications and dosages, symptoms and side effects, questions, and names and numbers for resources. Find out more about [managing a patient's care](#) [15].

Be an advocate. Take an active role in the patient's medical care. If possible, go with him or her to all medical appointments. It is helpful to write down questions for the doctor beforehand and to write down answers. In addition, give the doctor any new information that helps him or her make informed decisions. Learn more about [communicating with the doctor](#) [16].

Learn how to provide proper physical care. Some patients may need you to provide physical care such as bathing, dressing, feeding, using the toilet, and grooming. For help, talk with the health care team, watch health care videos, or read manuals or books that explain how to do these tasks. You may also want to hire professional help for these tasks if possible.

Addressing legal and financial issues

Ask for an insurance case manager. Many insurance companies will assign a person to help manage insurance concerns for a person with a serious illness. This person can help you learn what is covered by insurance, how to handle insurance issues, and find home care. Learn more about [health insurance](#) [17].

Determine financial status. Providing care for a person who is seriously ill can be financially challenging. Ask who will perform medical services and how specific services, such as medications or therapy, will be paid. Knowing the financial status of the patient can help guide

future health care choices. Some community organizations may provide [financial assistance for caregiving-related and treatment issues](#) [18].

Have legal documents in place. Legal documents called [advance directives](#) [19] are an effective, legally binding way to communicate a patient's wishes. A health care proxy is a person who can legally make health care decisions on another person's behalf. A health care proxy can be designated to speak for the patient when he or she cannot.

Early on, each patient should decide who will be a health care proxy. He or she should also tell professionals involved in care who their health care proxy is. A patient may also need documents, such as a durable power of attorney for health care and a living will.

More Information

[Taking Charge of Your Care](#) [20]

[Financial Considerations](#) [21]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/caring-loved-one/tips-caregiving>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Multimedia/Podcasts/Files/Tips_on_Caregiving.mp3

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25032>

[5] <http://mycancercircle.lotsahelpinghands.com/caregiving/home/>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24491>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25234>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25031>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30961>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25029>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>

[14]

<http://www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/managing-emotions/finding-support-and-information/cancer-specific-resources>

[15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25015>

[16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24958>

[17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24918>

[18] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25370>

[19] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25278>

[20] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24669>

[21] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24865>