

Effective Caregiving at Home

Taking care of a person with cancer is called being a caregiver. Caregiving is not easy, so it can be very useful to look for additional help and support during this time. The tips in this fact sheet can help you.

■ **How do I make caregiving a team effort?**

You might feel alone during caregiving, but there are many ways to make it a team effort. Family, friends, and volunteers can help, along with health care professionals. Each helper will bring different skills and strengths to caregiving, depending on how close they live and their schedules. Try to have regular, informal conversations to talk about concerns and opinions, so you can work together effectively. Whenever possible, make sure the person with cancer has a central role in these discussions. It can be very helpful to meet with the health care providers to get clear, accurate information about the cancer, including prognosis and treatment goals. Consider bringing a device or notepad to record these meetings and/or adult children or friends to help you manage all of the information.



■ **How can I manage the caregiving responsibilities?**

When you know what the person you are caring for needs and wants, it can be helpful to write down caregiving tasks in a list, such as giving care at home, providing transportation, offering companionship, and addressing financial issues. Then, work together with friends and family to create a schedule that lists which person is available when and for what tasks. There are many online tools and apps that allow you to easily communicate requests and information to people involved in the caregiving tasks. The goal is to plan ahead as much as possible to identify potential problems and prevent last-minute scheduling emergencies. When a problem arises, it's important to find out what's needed and follow through. Don't be afraid to seek advice from others and use creative solutions that work for you and the person you care for. Keep in mind that caregiving needs can change over time, so you may need to review tasks once in a while. Start planning by using the resources on the back of this fact sheet, which can also be found at www.cancer.net/caregiving.

■ **Are there services available to help me with caregiving?**

There are professional and volunteer caregiving services, including home care, meal delivery, and help with everyday activities. Some community agencies have volunteers who can help with transportation or advocate for health insurance or other benefits. You can get referrals to agencies and community resources from your loved one's doctor, oncology social worker, or nurse. You can also learn about available services from members of local or online support groups or state and county health agencies. If you are employed, ask your human resources manager about the Family Medical Leave Act, employee assistance programs, and other benefits that can help with caregiving.

■ **How can I take care of myself while caregiving?**

Taking care of your own emotional health, physical health, and personal responsibilities makes you a more effective caregiver. However, this can be difficult to do. A good first step is to recognize your own strengths and weaknesses as a caregiver so you can set boundaries and know when to ask for help. For example, have people reach you by email or text message so you aren't interrupted by many phone calls. It is also important to get rest and take breaks during caregiving. You can ask a family member or friend to stay with your loved one overnight if needed so you may travel or get rest at another location. If you're having trouble coping in any way, talk with others who are helping you care for the person with cancer. You may also wish to talk with other friends, religious or spiritual advisors, counselors, other caregivers, and health care professionals.

Caregiving Action Plan

What type of support can be helpful for you and the person you are caring for? Use a chart like this to divide tasks among friends, family, professionals, and others.

TASK	FAMILY/FRIENDS	COMMUNITY RESOURCES	PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES
Companionship			
Helping with meals and grocery shopping			
Doing household chores			
Childcare			
Pet care			
Driving to and from appointments			
Filling and picking up prescriptions			
Keeping family and friends informed			
Helping manage symptoms and side effects			
Coordinating medical appointments			
Giving medications			
Handling insurance and billing issues			

Do You Need Support?

You might find it helpful to talk with a doctor or a counselor if you check any of these boxes:

- I feel exhausted all of the time.
- I eat too little or too much.
- I get sick more often than usual.
- I am not able to sleep well.
- I feel impatient, irritated, or forgetful.
- I have trouble focusing or making decisions.
- I don't enjoy things I used to enjoy.
- I am withdrawing from people.
- I cry a lot.
- I have headaches and/or unexplained pains.
- I am drinking more alcohol than usual.
- I can't find any time for myself.

For more information and tips on providing care to a loved one with cancer, visit www.cancer.net/caregiving. Or download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY
 2318 Mill Road, Suite 800, Alexandria, VA 22314
 Toll Free: 888-651-3038 | Phone: 571-483-1300
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