

Caring for a Loved One With Cancer

Caring for a loved one with cancer is often demanding and stressful. Caregivers tend to feel overwhelmed and unsure of how best to care for their loved one. Care giving involves a large amount of responsibility that, at times, may leave you feeling worn out. Care giving may also bring you closer to your loved one and deepen your relationship. It's natural to feel multiple emotions as you care for your loved one, often at the same time (e.g., glad you are able to help AND overwhelmed). It is important to keep yourself well so that you are healthy and able to provide good care to your loved one.

Ways to Keep Yourself Well:

- Take time for yourself. Do activities you enjoy and spend time with others. Even short breaks of 15 to 20 minutes can help you feel more recharged.
- Pause and take a deep breath.
- Talk to others about your experience. It can be particularly helpful to talk with other caregivers.
- Don't do it all yourself. Ask for & *accept* help. You may find that people offer you help, yet it is difficult to accept it because you are used to doing so much on your own. Remember that care giving is stressful and by accepting help you can continue to provide good care.
- Be kind and gentle with yourself. If you notice yourself feeling guilty about taking care of yourself, focus on giving yourself permission to do so by telling yourself something like, "By taking time for me, I will be a more effective caregiver to my loved one." You can't do it all and that's okay!
- Acknowledge your feelings. Caregivers may feel guilty if they take time for themselves or if they become upset by all the demands of care giving. Having mixed feelings about care giving is natural and it is helpful to acknowledge how you feel.
- Limit using the words "must" and "should" (e.g., "I must get everything done today") as these types of words often make us feel guilty. Instead use a phrase such as "I choose to."
- Take care of your body. Eat healthy foods, exercise, stay hydrated, and get enough sleep.
- Keep up with your own medical appointments and medications

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- Know your signs of stress (e.g., headache, irritability, upset stomach, etc.) When you start to feel too stressed, take a break.
- Keep a journal. Writing about your thoughts and feelings can strengthen your spirit.
- Know your limits. There are only so many hours in the day; practice saying “No” when you don’t have the time or energy to do a task.
- Consider talking to a social worker or psychologist. They can assist you in coping with care giving.