



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

# CARING FOR MYSELF AS MY ILLNESS ADVANCES

**Caring for oneself may feel overwhelming at this time but there are many decisions that you can make to insure that this time is more positive and reaffirming. It is important that you have the strength and energy to devote to living and enjoying your time in whatever ways you are able to. There are many ways to receive the support you need.**

## AN ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKER CAN HELP

Having cancer can be daunting and requires making a lot of decisions all at once. Not having a spouse or partner might make it harder, but you don't have to deal with your fears and make those decisions on your own. An oncology social worker can help you navigate this process. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers can help, free of charge. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

## WAYS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AND GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Here are some suggestions, choose the ones that seem right for you.

**Maintain contact with friends and family.** Social isolation can increase emotional distress.

**Watch for signs of emotional distress:** extreme sadness, crying all the time, constantly worrying, losing interest in what you used to find pleasurable, and not feeling like yourself. If any of these symptoms make it difficult for you to accomplish your daily tasks, speak to a doctor, nurse or social worker.



**Listen to friends or family** if they notice changes in your mood.

**Pick and choose activities that are most important to you,** especially if you get tired easily.

**Don't be afraid to say no to certain activities** if you are trying to conserve your energy for projects you want to accomplish.

**Try to give yourself a few minutes each day for quiet reflection,** prayer or meditation if that is a comfort to you.

**Eat small meals throughout the day.** Do not worry if it is not a full meal. Eat foods that appeal to you. If you are not hungry, let your caregiver or family know.

**Drink water regularly.**

**Discuss your feelings and thoughts** with a spiritual leader.

**Do not be alarmed if you find yourself angry** or wondering about your beliefs.

**Reviewing your spiritual concerns and values is a normal activity** when you have a serious illness, after a crisis or at the end of life.

### **WHAT WILL HELP ME REGAIN A SENSE OF CONTROL?**

When someone's illness is progressing, it is common to feel overwhelmed, hopeless and afraid. Taking care of finances and legal documents can help with this anxiety. Here are some practical ways to regain a sense of control:

- Organize your important financial and legal papers.
- Explain to your family where these documents are kept.
- Name a person whom you want to oversee your daily business once you are no longer able to do so.
- Finalize advance directive documents (see our fact sheet on "advance care planning").
- Write a will explaining to whom and where you want your material possessions to go.
- Create an ethical will.
- Pre-plan a funeral or memorial service.



### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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