



CANCERcare®

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CAREGIVING AND THE CORONAVIRUS

Caregiving can be difficult under ordinary circumstances. Coupled with concerns and restrictions related to the coronavirus, things can be even harder for those supporting a loved one coping with a cancer diagnosis. Here is some advice on how to stay informed and support your loved one while minimizing their risk of infection.

KEEPING YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONE SAFE

Regardless of whether your state or municipality is under a “shelter in place” or similar restriction, it is best to limit contact with others as much as possible. To do so, practice social distancing, which means avoiding large gatherings, reducing your trips outside and maintaining at least six feet of distance from others in public. People can spread the virus without exhibiting any outward symptoms of feeling sick. The use of a cloth mask over nose and mouth is likely to diminish the disease’s spread to a great degree. Upon returning home or when handling outside packages, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for twenty seconds. Hand sanitizer is a useful alternative, so long as it has a 70% alcohol content. While in public, cover your hands with a cloth or sleeve when touching door handles, elevator buttons and stairway railings. You should also avoid touching your face or shaking hands. You can find more information on reducing your risk in our fact sheet “Coronavirus and COVID-19: What You Need to Know.”

STAY INFORMED

Because doctors and researchers learn more about the coronavirus and its treatment every day, try to keep updated with the best information possible from well-regarded organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). If getting too much information causes distress, you may wish to limit the information you or your loved one receive.



Check the sources of materials and information, and beware of rumors or false information, for example, about coronavirus-fighting remedies.

It is also important to be aware of changes in your loved one’s cancer treatment. For more guidance, refer to our fact sheet “Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team About the Coronavirus.”

WHEN MAINTAINING DIRECT CONTACT

If still in direct contact with your loved one, reduce your loved one’s risk of exposure as much as possible by adopting the practices of social distancing outlined above. Clean any objects coming from outside the home, such as deliveries. The CDC also recommends sanitizing high-touch surfaces and common areas with household disinfecting wipes, household cleaners or a diluted bleach solution (1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water). If a mask and gloves must be reused, they should also be sanitized with a disinfectant. Consult your loved one’s health care team for their advice on what to disinfect and how to do so safely.

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WHEN LIMITING PHYSICAL CONTACT

If you do not feel comfortable visiting your loved one, or are unable to visit due to sickness or potential exposure, you can maintain contact by calling, emailing, texting and video chatting. Emotional health is an important consideration and our social networks are important. Gently suggest hobbies, peaceful activities and other balancing elements like meditation. Assure them that this situation is not forever. Continue to play a role in treatment and any changes, including televisits and scheduling. Find ways to limit your loved one's need to run errands for themselves, whether by finding another volunteer or by using delivery services for groceries, other supplies and prescriptions when possible.

SELF-CARE AND AVOIDING BURNOUT

It can be difficult to care for someone while the world is undergoing such profound changes. Feeling overwhelmed is completely natural, as are feelings of burnout, sadness, anxiety or depression. Talk about how you feel with family, friends or a professional, such as a CancerCare oncology social worker. The same self-care elements that can protect your loved one's peace of mind also apply to yourself. Deep breathing exercises and meditation can help you stay grounded. Journaling is a great way to process thoughts and emotions. Adhere to a routine as much as possible, including exercise and rest. Ask if someone in your support system can take over some of your duties, allowing you to step away and decompress.

CancerCare continues to offer support services over the phone and through telephone and online support groups. If you already have a counselor or therapist that is supporting you, explore if they are able to provide online or telephone counseling.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

You may be feeling a great deal of pressure to ensure financial stability due to the economic impacts of the coronavirus. Acknowledge that these stresses are real and that there are many unknowns in the situation; you can't be expected to have all of the answers immediately. Be gentle and forgiving with yourself, and know that you are not alone in coping with these concerns. If it is appropriate for your relationship with your loved one, do what is possible to shield them from these fears while making sure to have an outlet or safe space of your own to express yourself. There are financial resources available for those affected. Call CancerCare's toll-free Hopeline at 800-813-HOPE (4673) to learn more.

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 case management, 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 master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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