



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS: HANDLING BURNOUT

Millions of Americans care for a loved one with cancer every year, with one in three caregivers dedicating time every week that is equivalent to a full-time job. While caregiving allows for an opportunity to provide for someone you love, the long-term stresses of caregiving can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion.

THINGS TO CONSIDER TO AVOID BURNOUT

Also called compassion fatigue, caregiver burnout can cause you to act less caring than you normally would. This can lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety, which can lead to poorer health outcomes for both yourself and your loved one.

It's important to remember that these experiences are not uncommon. Your feelings are valid and real, and acknowledging them is an important first step in any effort to refresh yourself. Even though caregiving can feel overwhelming at times, there are still things you can do to help yourself:

Ask for help. Reaching out to others for help can feel intimidating, especially when you're not sure what others could and are willing to provide. Create a list of tasks you need assistance with and reach out to friends and family to find specific ways that each person can help.

Find home health care. In some cases, professional home care or a palliative care agency may help alleviate some of your medical duties. Contact your loved one's insurance provider to assess their home health care benefits.

Schedule time for self-care. Finding a spare moment as a caregiver can be difficult, but savoring the short breaks can make a difference. There's nothing wrong with enjoying these private moments for yourself.



Learn to say no. Burnout and exhaustion often come from overexerting yourself, physically or emotionally. If you feel like you're doing too much, you probably are. Prioritize the things that need to get done and say "no" to activities that can wait for later.

Say yes for yourself. In prioritizing what needs to get done, don't forget to put yourself and your well-being on that list. Whether it be basic things like getting restful sleep, going for a walk, practicing a hobby you enjoy or going to a yoga class, make sure to find a good balance of saying "yes" to your needs alongside your caregiving obligations.

Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness involves being present with your emotions and letting them proceed without interference or judgment. This practice has been shown to have some benefit on both physical and mental health. Meditation is a great way to be mindful; phone apps like Calm can help you get started.

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Seek support. Joining a support group of cancer caregivers can provide space to process your caregiving experiences with people who understand. Ask someone on your loved one's treatment team for a referral to a local, in-person group. Support groups are also available online, over the phone and in-person through CancerCare and other organizations.

Counseling. Oncology social workers are licensed professionals who specialize in individualized and group counseling with people affected by cancer. CancerCare's oncology social workers can help you in proactive coping, which may help you reduce symptoms and feelings of burnout. For long-term support, you can consult an online directory or your health insurance provider to find a counselor in your area. Remember, it's not necessary to have a cancer diagnosis of your own to seek out such support.

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 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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COMMON SIGNS OF BURNOUT

Constant strength and energy can be difficult to maintain. The following may be indicators of caregiver fatigue and may require greater attention:

- Prolonged feelings of sadness, helplessness or hopelessness
- Feeling tired, even after getting plenty of sleep
- Lack of interest in doing things, especially things you typically enjoy
- Neglecting basic self-care
- Getting sick more easily with the common cold or the flu
- Trouble concentrating
- Chronic feelings of anxiety and difficulty relaxing
- Disproportionally negative reactions to minor stressors
- Impatience with the person you're caring for
- Changes in appetite or sleeping patterns

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