

ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS: HOW CAN YOU HELP YOURSELF?

Caregivers are individuals who provide emotional and physical care for a person with cancer. Being a caregiver can be a full-time job, and caregivers often put their own needs or feelings aside while caring for their loved one. Taking good care of yourself is an important part of being a caregiver. This can help you handle your caregiving responsibilities.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE A CAREGIVER

Organize help. Decide which of your loved one's needs you can or would like to help with and which ones will require further assistance. Then, ask family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers or professionals who would be able to lend a hand. Ideally, many people will want to help. Realistically, only one or two people may be available. Still, these individuals can make a big difference. You can also check with community agencies, religious institutions or a hospital social worker for information on volunteer and respite care programs.

Join a support group for caregivers. Support groups help many caregivers feel less alone. They provide a safe, supportive environment for sharing feelings and discussing the challenges and rewards of being a caregiver. Group members provide a listening ear and share tips and resources they've learned along the way. CancerCare offers free, professionally led face-to-face, telephone and online support groups for caregivers.

Become informed. Learn about your loved one's diagnosis and treatment so you have a sense of what to expect. With your loved one's permission, you may want to speak to the doctor or nurse if you have any concerns. They can recommend resources for learning more and getting support.



Find out who else on the health care team (such as an oncology social worker, oncology nurse or pharmacist) is available to help you if you have any questions.

Understand your rights. Under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), eligible employers are required to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for family members who need time off to care for a loved one with a serious health condition. You should speak to your loved one's medical team for a certification to show your employer. For help with insurance rules and regulations, contact your loved one's insurance company. Many insurance companies will assign a case manager to address concerns, clarify benefits and suggest ways to obtain additional health-related services.

Keep up with your own check-ups, screenings and medications.

Your health is very valuable. Stay on top of your own doctor's appointments, and find a good system for remembering to take any medicines you need.

Get individual help. As a caregiver, you may sometimes feel overwhelmed and need more than friends or family members to talk to. Speaking with a counselor or social worker can help you cope with some of the emotions or concerns you may be facing as a caregiver. CancerCare provides free individual counseling from oncology social workers who specialize in helping people with cancer and their loved ones and caregivers.

Do something good for yourself. Take a few moments for yourself each day to do something enjoyable or relaxing, even if it's just taking a walk around the block. Give yourself credit for all you do as a caregiver, and find ways to reward yourself for your hard work.

**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.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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