

Caregiving for a loved one with cancer can be very stressful. It is easy to become overwhelmed. This fact sheet discusses:

- The effects of stress on caregivers
- Ways to cope emotionally
- Helping yourself physically
- Asking for help



What Are the Effects of Stress on Caregivers?

Stress can have emotional and physical impacts. Emotional effects tend to show up first.

Emotional effects. Feeling worried, anxious, sad, or irritated. Becoming angry or overreacting to things that normally do not bother you. Or, feeling tearful and down more often than usual.

Physical symptoms. Stress may cause tension, headaches, sleep problems and weight changes. Long-term stress can increase chances of chronic health problems, such as heart disease or high blood pressure. Any existing health conditions could get worse.



How Can You Manage Your Stress?

Feeling stressed and overwhelmed is normal and not a sign that you're failing as a caregiver. But, it is important to find ways to manage it. Here are some coping tips:

Educate yourself. Learn as much as you can about your loved one's cancer, how it's treated and what resources are available to you. Ask the medical team questions. This can reduce uncertainty.

Find someone to talk to. Try to share your feelings with someone you trust: a partner, sibling, another family member, friend, spiritual leader or social worker. Caregiver support groups are also available. These can give you an opportunity to meet and learn from others in similar situations.

Try relaxation techniques. Activities such as yoga, tai chi, reiki, or meditation can help. Listening to your favorite music or writing in a journal are helpful too. Read CancerCare's fact sheet "Relaxation Techniques and Mindfulness Practices: Coping With Cancer" for more.



What Are Ways to Help Yourself Physically?

It can be difficult to maintain a health lifestyle when stressed. The following activities and routines could help:

- **Eat healthy.** Try to eat balanced, home-cooked meals regularly. Include plenty of fruits and vegetables, and drink plenty of water.
- **Exercise.** Working out is one of the best things you can do to stay healthy. Exercise could be done by going to a gym, or even in the comfort of your own home. Walking outside is a great form of exercise.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Take time to wind down and relax before bedtime. Six to eight hours of sleep per night is best. Relaxation techniques and deep-breathing exercises can also help. Avoid looking at your phone, computer, or the television before bedtime.
- **Keep up with your own health.** Make sure you get regular checkups and go to your own doctor's appointments. Stay on track with your medications and recommended screenings.



What Are Ways Others Can Help You?

Ask for help with medical tasks. You may feel unprepared to give the medical care their loved one needs at home. Talk to their health care team if there is anything you are unsure about. Make sure you understand their instructions. Write them down so you don't forget what you need to do.

Get support from professionals. Consider speaking directly with a nurse, doctor or pharmacist about your concerns. One-on-one conversations can help keep things simple. They can reassure you about what you are doing and give you the information you need.

Ask friends and family to help. One of the easiest ways to reduce stress is to ask others to do tasks for you. These do not have to be directly related to the care itself. Even having somebody help clean the house, cook a meal or care for a pet can be extremely helpful.

Seek counseling. If you are having a difficult time processing your emotions, there are individual and group counseling options available for caregivers. This is especially helpful if you cannot share your honest thoughts and emotions with friends, family, or your loved one.

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