

Being a Caregiver



A caregiver is someone who helps take care of a person with cancer. In most cases, the main caregiver is not paid – usually a spouse, partner, or adult child. Sometimes close friends, coworkers, or neighbors may fill this role. The caregiver is a key part of the care for the person with cancer.



What does a caregiver do?

A caregiver is part of the cancer care team, which also includes the person with cancer and the medical staff. Caregivers do many things to help the person with cancer, like:

- Bathe, groom, and dress.
- Eat and get rest.
- Take medicines.
- Keep track of appointments.
- Take care of insurance problems.
- Get to and from appointments.
- Help with other family members' needs.
- Talk to the cancer care team.
- Help them live their life as normal as possible.



How to be a good caregiver

A good caregiver is often the one person who knows everything that's going on with the patient. Don't be afraid to ask questions and take notes during doctor visits. Learn who the members of the cancer care team are and know how to contact them.

- Involve the person with cancer as much as possible to do their part to get better.
- Let the person with cancer make decisions. If they're overwhelmed with decisions, give them simple choices.

- If the person with cancer does things that can cause them harm, get help and talk with the cancer care team. (Things like not taking medicines or not following activity limits may be poor choices that should not be ignored.)
- Sometimes you might need to set limits with the patient. For example, have them care for themselves as much as they can, and encourage them to talk about things other than cancer and illness.
- Remember that professional help is there for you, too. It's normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes when caring for someone with cancer. Ask the cancer care team for help when you need it.
- Take care of your own needs. While you're helping the person with cancer, you must also take care of yourself. Be sure to keep your own doctor appointments, get enough sleep, exercise, eat healthy foods, and keep your normal routine as much as you can.
- Don't try to do it all yourself! Reach out to others. Involve them in your life and in the things you must do for the patient.



When others want to help

- Asking for help or letting others help can take some of the pressure off and allow you time to take care of yourself.
- Think about situations where you may need help. Make a list or note them on a calendar.

- Hold regular family meetings to keep everyone involved. Use these meetings as updates and to plan the patient's care. Include the person with cancer.
- Ask family and friends when they can help and what jobs they think they can do. Be very clear about what you need.
- When you hear back from each person, note it on your list to make sure they have taken care of what you needed.



What if I mess up?

No matter what you do, you'll likely come to a point where you feel that you did not do something as well as you'd liked to do.

As a caregiver, you do the best you can. Sometimes, you'll feel that you could have handled a situation better or done something a better way. Try not to blame yourself. Find a way to forgive yourself and move on. Try to keep a sense of humor about it. Focus on those things that you do well.

It's not easy to be a caregiver, but it can be rewarding.



For more information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at **cancer.org** or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

