Being a Caregiver

A caregiver is the person who helps the person with cancer most often – without being paid to do so. In most cases, the main caregiver is a spouse, partner, or an adult child. Sometimes close friends, co-workers, or neighbors may fill this role. The caregiver is a key part of the cancer patient's care.

What does a caregiver do?

The caregiver is part of the cancer care team, which also includes the patient and the medical staff. Caregivers do many things, like:

- Help feed, dress, and bathe the patient.
- Make sure the patient eats and gets rest.
- See that the patient takes medicines as they were told to.
- Keep track of appointments.
- Take care of insurance problems.
- Drive the patient.
- Help with other family members' needs.
- Talk to the cancer care team about how the patient is doing.
- Help the patient live as normal a life 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.

- ✔ Keep the patient involved in planning their care. Help the patient do their part to get better.
- ✔ Let the person with cancer make decisions. If the patient is making poor choices, talk to them about their choices. Then talk it over with the cancer care team and get their help. (Things like not taking medicines or not following activity limits may be poor choices that should not be ignored.)

more on back →

American Cancer Society®

- ✔ Sometimes you might need to set limits with the patient. For example, have the patient 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 frustrated, upset, and stressed 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 your loved one, 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 your loved one.

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. Family and friends often want to help but may not know how or what you need. Here are some tips for working with family and friends:

- Look for areas where you need help. Make a list.
- Hold regular family meetings to keep everyone up to date. Use these meetings as a time to plan the patient's care. Include the patient.
- 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 have failed your loved one in some way. Even though you do the best you can, there may be times you'll feel that you could have done better. Try not to blame yourself. Find a way to forgive yourself and move on. It helps to bear in mind that you'll keep making mistakes, and try to keep a sense of humor about it. Focus on those things that you do well.

Caring for someone going through cancer treatment is a demanding job, but being good at it can give you a sense of meaning and pride. These positive feelings can give you the strength to go on for as long as you're needed.

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

For more information about being a caregiver, please call us at 1-800-227-2345 or visit www.cancer.org anytime, day or night.

Thanks to the generous donations from corporate supporters and individuals like you, **we save lives** by helping people stay well and get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back.

cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

Written July 2015

© 2009, American Cancer Society, Inc.
No. 213400-Rev. 7/15
Models used for illustrative purposes only.