### **American Cancer Society**

# Information and Support for Caregivers



#### Who is a cancer caregiver?

A cancer caregiver is an individual who has a personal connection and commitment to someone with cancer and provides care outside of a hospital setting.



#### Caring for the caregiver.

A diagnosis of cancer does not just affect the patient – it also affects the caregiver.

Caregiver fatigue or even burnout can be brought on by the physical and emotional aspects of caring for a loved one with cancer.



#### Caregivers need to take time for themselves and their own needs.

- Watch for signs of stress, such as impatience, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, or difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- ➤ Be aware of any changes in mood, decreased interest in usual activities, or an inability to accomplish usual tasks.



#### Caregivers need a well-balanced diet.

- > Drink plenty of water and juice every day.
- Eat energy foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, rice, pasta, meats, and cheeses.
- Take a multi-vitamin.
- Decrease or avoid caffeine, sugar, concentrated sweets, and alcohol.



#### Caregivers need to exercise.

- Exercise is one of the best and easiest methods to reduce stress.
- Continue the methods of exercise that have been used in the past.
- > Try a short walk, walk in place, or walk stairs.
- Check local shopping malls for a place to walk.
- > Try to get some exercise every day.



#### Caregivers need to relax.

- Listen to relaxation tapes or music to help reduce stress.
- > Do progressive muscle relaxation exercises.
- Take a break, find a comfortable place, sit down, and close your eyes. Breathe deeply and slowly.
- > Create a quiet scene in your mind.
- Take a warm bath.
- Meditate or pray.



#### Caregivers must be good timemanagers.

- > Try to make a list every day.
- ➤ Prioritize what needs to be done first. Delegate everything possible to people who offer to help.
- Try not to over-schedule, the caregiver needs some time, too.
- Space activities with short rest periods.



#### Set limits with the cancer patient.

- Determine what self-care tasks the patient can perform. Encourage independence when appropriate.
- Create a climate that encourages and supports the sharing of feelings.
- Let the patient make as many personal decisions as possible.



#### Don't overload daily "to-do" lists.

- > Be realistic.
- A large amount of time is taken up by caregiving activities old schedules won't work now.



### Caregivers need to continue engaging in activities that are pleasurable to them.

- Find time for enjoyable activities several times a week.
- > Visit friends.
- > Participate in hobbies
- Do gardening or yard work.
- ➤ Look for humor in daily activities.
- > Try to simplify your life.
- > Tend to spiritual needs.



## Family members and friends can help by:

- Doing household chores, making meals, providing childcare, or shopping.
- Accessing community resources for respite care.
- Running errands, driving to doctor appointments, picking up medicine, or grocery shopping.
- Cleaning house and providing lawn care or snow removal.

## Lines of communication need to stay open.

- Create a climate that encourages and supports the sharing of feelings between the patient and caregiver.
- ➤ Be clear about what information and answers are needed from the health care providers.
- Talk to others when experiencing stress, anxiety, anger, guilt, etc.



#### Caregivers need to share their feelings.

- Feelings can be shared with family members, friends, or other caregivers.
- Support groups are also available. Contact your local American Cancer Society office for a list of support groups in your area.



#### Caregivers need to take credit.

- The care given does make a difference.
- Most caregivers feel their roles are important, and they are.
- Caregivers are doing the best job they can do. They need to look for help when needed and keep looking until it is found!



## For more information, contact the American Cancer Society.

For more information on cancer, cancer resources, or caregiving, call the American Cancer Society 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 1-800-ACS-2345, or visit their Web site at www.cancer.org.

