

Managing Caregiver Stress

Information for people caring for a loved one with cancer



Read this guide to learn about:

- what caregiver stress is
- how to know if you have it
- how you can help manage caregiver stress
- who to call if you need help



I'm caring for a loved one who has cancer. Is it normal for me to feel stressed?

Yes, this is normal. This stress is called caregiver stress. Sometimes, caregivers can feel even more stress than the patients. You may be so busy caring for your loved one that you forget to care for yourself. This can be tiring and stressful.

Feeling too much stress can affect your loved one. They may start to see and feel your stress as well. To help your loved one, you need to take care of yourself.

How can I tell if I have caregiver stress?

Sometimes, it's hard to tell how stressed you feel. Ask yourself if you are feeling these ways:

- I can't get enough rest.
- I don't have time for myself.
- I don't have enough time to be with other family members.
- I feel guilty about my situation.
- I don't leave the hospital to do other things anymore.
- I have arguments with the person I care for.
- I have arguments with other family members.
- I cry every day.
- I worry about having enough money. I don't know the best way to care for my loved one.
- I feel my health is not good.

If you usually or always have these feelings, you may have caregiver stress.

What are the different kinds of caregiver stress?

You might have one or more of these kinds of caregiver stress:

Physical:

Taking care of a loved one can be tiring. You may not have time to eat well and exercise. This can affect your own health.

Financial:

It can be expensive to provide care to your loved one. Trying to manage all of the costs can cause stress.

Environmental:

You may have gone through many changes to help care for your loved one. How you spend your day or where you live may have changed. These kinds of changes can cause stress.

Social:

You may be spending so much time with your loved one that you don't have time for other family or friends. Not having family and friends around for support can be stressful.

Emotional:

Different kinds of caregiver stress can cause you to feel emotions like:

- angry
- depressed
- lonely
- afraid
- guilty
- embarrassed
- frustrated
- helpless

Knowing the kinds of stress you feel can help you make the right kinds of changes.

What can I do to avoid caregiver stress?

Here is a list of things you can do that will help reduce your stress:

- Make sure you eat at least 3 healthy meals a day.
- Try to exercise for at least 2 or more hours each week.
- Try to get at least 7 or 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Join a support group. A support group is a group of people in a similar situation who meet regularly to share their experiences. Knowing you are not alone can help you feel better.
- Talk to your friends and family regularly and share your feelings with them.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Accept how you are feeling.
- Make sure you keep your medical and dental appointments.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don't try to do everything.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Make time to relax and care for yourself.

Breathing deeply can relax your body. Try this breathing exercise:

1. Sit down in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Put your hands on your stomach.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose. Feel your stomach push out from your body.
4. Hold your breath for 3 seconds.
5. Breathe out through your mouth slowly and feel your stomach fall back into your body.
6. Do this a few times. This will help your body relax.

Thinking about a peaceful and calm place can relax your mind. Try this thinking exercise:

1. Think about or imagine a place that is very relaxing for you. For example, it might be a place by a lake or ocean, a grassy field, or a garden.
2. Picture yourself in that place. Pretend you are there. Think about what you would see, hear, smell, touch or taste.
3. Let yourself feel as relaxed as you would feel if you were there.
4. Return to this place in your mind any time you feel stressed and need to relax.

Where can I get more help if I need it?

There are many places you can get help while your loved one is in the hospital.

These services are free.

Patient and Family Resource Centres

Main Floor, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 5090

Website: www.library.theprincessmargaret.ca

Psychosocial Oncology

- Social Work

Phone: 416 946 4525

This department provides:

- emotional support and counseling
- information about other resources
- help with discharge planning
- information about other community service providers

- **Psychiatry**

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 5405

This department can provide psychological support and treatment.

- **Occupational Therapy**

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 5580

This department can provide relaxation therapy and training.

- **Palliative Care Team**

Phone: 416 946 2135

The palliative care team can provide advice and community support

- **Chaplaincy or Spiritual Care**

Phone: 416 946 4460

This service can provide spiritual support.

Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 4560

This centre can provide equipment and personal support for when your loved one returns home.

Once your loved one is back at home, you may find it helpful to contact the following community resources:

Canadian Cancer Society

Phone: 416 488 5400

Website: www.cancer.ca

The Canadian Cancer Society can provide:

- emotional support by telephone (1 800 263 6750) or counseling in person
- transportation to and from medical appointments
- updated cancer or other information

- information about other services like:
 - housekeeping
 - daycare
 - respite care (someone to come to your house to care for your loved one for a few hours)
 - companionship services (someone to come to your house to visit with your loved one)

Wellspring

Website: www.wellspring.ca

Wellspring is a lifeline to cancer support. It's a support centre for patients and families living with cancer.

Wellspring Locations:

Toronto

Wellspring Downtown Toronto

4 Charles Street East

Toronto, ON M4Y 1T1

Phone: 416 961 1928

Toll Free: 1 877 499 9904

Fax: 416 961 3721

Westerkirk House at Sunnybrook

2075 Bayview Avenue

Toronto, ON M4N 3M5

Phone: 416 480 4440

Toll Free: 1 877 499-9904

Fax: 416 480 4496

Greater Toronto Area West

Chinguacousy

5 Inspiration Way
Brampton, ON L6R 0L7
Phone: 905 792 6480
Toll Free: 1 877 499 9904
Fax: 905 792 1525

Birmingham Gilgan House

2545 Sixth Line
Oakville, ON L6H 7V9
Phone: 905 257 1988
Toll Free: 1 877 499-9904
Fax: 905 257 6146

Southern Ontario

London and Region

382 Waterloo Street
(Inside the YMCA)
London, ON N6B 2N8
Phone: 519 438 7379
Fax: 877 811 2645

Stratford Program Satellite Centre

48 Well Street
Stratford, ON N5A 4L7
Phone: 519 271 2232

Niagara

3250 Schmon Parkway, Unit #3
Thorold, ON L2V 4Y6
Phone: 905 684 7619
Toll Free: 1 888 707 1277

Niagara Stevensville Satellite Centre

2763 Stevensville Road. Unit #3

Stevensville, ON L0S 1S0

Phone: 905 382 6121

Gilda's Club Greater Toronto

Phone: 416 214 9898

Website: www.gildasclubtoronto.org

Address: 24 Cecil Street, Toronto, ON M5T 1N2

This club provides cancer support for the whole family. It has a program of social and emotional support that can help anyone living with cancer. All program activities are free.

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