

## What it means to be a **CAREGIVER**



### **YOU MAY NOT THINK OF YOURSELF AS A CAREGIVER.**

You may just see it as taking care of someone you love or lending a helping hand, but what you are doing is extremely important, yet also challenging. Throughout this fact sheet, the person receiving care is referred to as a “loved one”.

### **Am I a caregiver?**

If you are providing regular assistance to a person who has a serious illness, you are a caregiver.

As a caregiver, you help a loved one with his or her daily needs. You may be a son or a daughter, a husband or a wife, a parent, an in-law, a neighbour or a friend. You may live together, next door, across the province or across the country. Your loved one may only need support occasionally, or he or she may not be able to manage alone.

## Caregiver tasks

Depending on what your loved one needs, you can help by

- Going grocery shopping and preparing meals
- Assisting with personal hygiene and changing clothes
- Assisting with using the bathroom
- Cleaning
- Doing laundry
- Keeping track of finances
- Driving your loved one to appointments and treatments
- Providing emotional support
- Communicating with members of the healthcare team
- Reminding him or her to take medication and adhere to the treatment plan
- Taking notes during medical appointments
- Communicating with other friends and family members

## Caregiving strategies

Caregiving can be a full-time, nonstop job that wears on you physically and emotionally. But, there are many things you can do to make caring for your loved one easier.

Use the following suggestions so you don't feel overwhelmed and can be at your best to help your loved one:

### **Acknowledge that an adult has the right to make decisions about his or her life.**

Respect that right unless your loved one is no longer capable of making decisions or could put himself/herself or others in danger through his or her behavior.

### **Whenever possible, offer choices.**

You may find you want to save your loved one the time or the hassle of making decisions on every last detail by doing it for him or her. Instead, you should continue to give your loved one the option of making choices for him or herself because his or her options may become more limited due to health changes, financial constraints or social losses with time.

### **Do only those things your loved one can't do.**

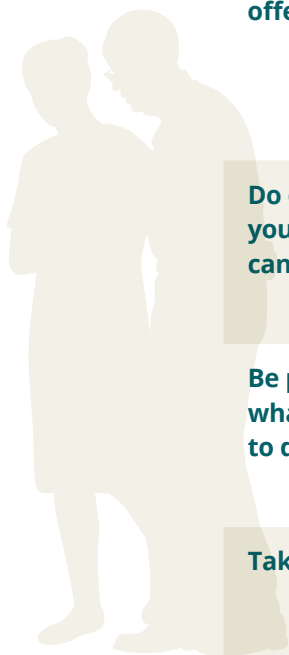
If your loved one is still capable of performing certain activities, such as paying bills or cooking meals, encourage him or her to do so. Helping your loved one maintain a feeling of independence will make him or her feel better about being in a care-receiving situation.

### **Be prepared to do what you promise to do.**

Many care recipients find it emotionally difficult to depend on others, and many worry about being a burden. With all these mixed feelings, your loved one needs to be able to rely on you. Remember that your loved one needs you, even if he or she doesn't say so.

### **Take care of yourself.**

Caregivers often exhaust themselves by trying to handle caregiving responsibilities on top of normal daily routines. Providing care for a loved one while holding down a job, and perhaps taking care of a family, can lead to exhaustion. If you become exhausted, you're more likely to make bad decisions or to take your frustrations out on your loved one. Take time to sleep and to do things you enjoy. It is important to take time for yourself so that you can be there for the long haul. Ask your loved one's healthcare team to suggest local resources, such as adult day care services that can give you some relief from responsibilities that may feel overwhelming.





**Give yourself a break.**

At some point in your role as a caregiver, you may start to feel resentment toward your caregiving responsibilities or even your loved one, especially if you are a long-term caregiver. These thoughts may be followed by feelings of guilt. Caregiving is a difficult job so don't beat yourself up over these normal and common feelings.

**Remember that your family is your first resource.**

There can be deep emotional currents when a loved one becomes ill. Some family members will want to do everything, while others will do very little unless they're asked. Yet, spouses, brothers and sisters, children and other relatives and friends can do a lot to ease your caregiving burden. Don't be afraid to reach out to them for help.



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1 833 222-4884 • [canadainfo@lls.org](mailto:canadainfo@lls.org) • [bloodcancers.ca](http://bloodcancers.ca)