



Caring for
YOURSELF

AS A CAREGIVER you may neglect to take good care of your own needs because you are so focused on caring for your loved one. This is understandable, but to offer your loved one the best possible care, you need to be healthy and well yourself, both physically and emotionally. In the next few pages, learn how you can take better care of yourself while also caring for your loved one.





Ways to care for yourself

Caregiving can be a full-time job. Often, caregivers will just keep doing what needs to be done and neglect their own well-being or feel guilty if they do take time for themselves. Even if you only have a few minutes to spare here and there, taking that time for yourself to do at least some of these things for yourself can help you from feeling exhausted or burned out.

Doing things for yourself

- Exercise like walking or taking an exercise class.
- Create a support system. Call friends or a family member when you need to talk or need help.
- Keep up with a hobby or something you enjoy doing, such as reading, painting or gardening.
- Stay connected with friends even if you have less time to spend with them.
- Keep a journal to express yourself so that you can process and cope with your emotions.
- Eat well-balanced meals. Caregiving can leave little time, and many people turn to fast food or junk food.
- Have a place where you can go to “escape” and just be by yourself.
- Set priorities each day and make sure the most important tasks get done, but try not to worry about items further down on your to-do list.
- Seek proper medical care for yourself by seeing your primary care provider. Follow any directions given by your doctor. For example, take any medications as prescribed.
- Try to cut out smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Get a good amount of sleep each night and find time to rest throughout the day.

Accept help from friends and family members

Learning to let go and to accept help from others will lower your anxiety levels and raise your spirits. People want to chip in, but they may not be sure how to help you. Keep a list of all caregiving tasks. That way, when friends or family members offer to help, you can give them specific tasks. Try using a caregiver mobile app to help you coordinate help from family and friends.

Take a break

If you're a full-time caregiver, you can't always take a day off, but learning techniques to alleviate stress throughout the day can be extremely helpful. Try deep-breathing techniques. Listen to relaxing music, take a short walk or call a friend. However you choose to get away during the day, you need at least 30 minutes a day to yourself.



Creating a self-care plan

It's easy to say you want to take more time for yourself, but it can often be hard to actually find the time to do it if you don't consciously make time or set self-care goals.

Self-care is

- Taking action to maintain or improve your own mental, emotional and physical health, especially during times of stress.
- Intentionally doing things that improve your mood and lower your stress levels.

Physical self-care plan

As a caregiver, if you are not physically well, you will not be able to take care of your loved one.

Check all the statements below that are true.

- I eat a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, proteins, whole grains and healthy fats.
- I drink at least eight 8-oz glasses of water or fluid a day (an 8x8 goal).
- I sleep well each night and wake up feeling rested.
- I exercise for 30 minutes at least three times a week.
- I do not smoke or use tobacco. I only drink alcohol in moderation.
- I keep up with my own medical needs, such as getting an annual checkup from my primary care provider, and I get regular dental cleanings.

Did you leave any of these statements unchecked? If so, you may need to consider improving those aspects of physical self-care.

List the ways you will improve your physical well-being.

- Drink more water to stay hydrated.

Write down a few short-term goals to improve your physical well-being.

- I will keep a water bottle with me throughout the day to make sure I meet the 8x8 goal.



Use worksheet:
Creating a self-care plan



Mental and emotional self-care plan

Taking care of your mental and emotional health is just as important as caring for your physical health. It's important to take time for yourself each day and to keep up with activities that you enjoy. With the daily responsibilities of caregiving, you may forget to do these things. Make a conscious effort to take time to care for your mental and emotional health.

What activities do you enjoy? Check all that apply.

- Listening to music, playing an instrument or singing
 - Reading or listening to audiobooks
 - Exercising or participating in group exercise classes
 - Playing sports or organized games with friends
 - Hiking, fishing, or other outdoor sports
 - Meditating or practicing yoga
 - Painting, drawing, or other types of art making
 - Journaling or creative writing
 - Attending religious or spiritual services
 - Activities with friends or family
 - Practicing personal care, such as long baths, manicures or face masks
 - Cooking or baking
 - Watching movies or TV shows
 - Playing video or computer games
 - Puzzles
 - Yard work or gardening
- Other: _____

Any of these activities can be part of a self-care plan. Pick one or two of your favorite activities and make them a priority in your day-to-day life. Change the activity and frequency to adjust to your lifestyle and needs, but be sure to make the time for yourself.





Stay calm strategy

When caring for a loved one with cancer, there will be times that are difficult and emotional. It's unavoidable. Prepare for these moments by having a strategy in place to help yourself calm down if you feel anxious or overwhelmed. Having a plan in place, in advance, will help you better manage unexpected intense emotions.

What you can do to calm down

- Do a breathing exercise.
- Repeat a meaningful mantra, affirmation or prayer.
- Close your eyes and sit in silence.
- Stand up and stretch.
- Take a quick walk outside.
- Call a close friend or family member.

How to do a deep-breathing exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Place one hand on your stomach and your other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should not move much.
4. Exhale through your nose. The hand on your stomach should move, and the hand on your chest should not move much. Focus on your breathing and your hands.

There are a variety of breathing exercises you can find online. Try a few different ones until you find one that works for you.

Ask for help and delegate tasks

As a primary caregiver for a loved one with cancer, you may worry that if you don't take care of your loved one, then no one else will. More than likely, there are friends and family members who really want to help—they just may not know how, so let them know! What tasks could you delegate to someone else? Write down the tasks and put names of people who can help with each one and when. Share this list with the friends and family members offering help.

Support for caregivers

Caregiving can be a lonely experience. Caregivers often don't feel that they should be seeking support for themselves. But to be able to care for loved ones, it is very important that caregivers take really good care of themselves, too.

Caregivers and depression

Feeling sad, depressed, or anxious after a loved one is diagnosed with cancer is normal. However, if these feelings start to interfere with your daily activities, you may need individual counselling from a medical professional.

Symptoms of clinical depression include

- Ongoing sadness or feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- Major weight loss or weight gain
- Agitation or restlessness
- Fatigue or no energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble focusing, remembering, or making decisions
- Feeling worthless, guilty, or helpless
- Thoughts of death or suicide



Don't be afraid to seek help. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada offers a number of helpful resources. For more information about how we can help you, visit bloodcancers.ca or ask to speak with your local Community Services Manager at 1-833-222-4884.



LEUKEMIA &
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Never hesitate to contact us, we're here to help!

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