



Relationship CHANGES

Managing your relationship with your loved one may be an unexpected challenge of caregiving. Your relationship with your loved one may change as you transition into your new role, changing your day-to-day life and the dynamics of your relationship with your loved one. All relationships are different, so the challenges you face may also be different. Considering these potential challenges in advance may prepare you for any future issues and allow you to take action now to prevent problems.

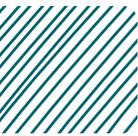


Caring for your spouse or significant other

You and your spouse likely view your relationship as an equal partnership, but a cancer diagnosis may change that dynamic. If your loved one has had to stop working for treatment or is not able to help with daily chores, they may feel guilty for not contributing. If you have young children, extra childcare responsibilities may also fall to you. Cancer can also make intimacy a challenge. Treatments for cancer can cause changes in sexual desire and function. Some people feel less attractive or desirable when their physical appearance changes or they are not feeling well.

Intimacy issues

If you are a caregiver for a romantic partner, know that sex and intimacy may change after a cancer diagnosis.

**Rethink what intimacy means to you both.**

Do not be afraid to reach out to the healthcare team for help with physical issues, such as decreased desire, pain with intercourse, vaginal dryness or erectile dysfunction.

Infertility is a side effect of some cancer treatments.

Find out from the healthcare team if it is safe for your loved one to engage in sexual activity and whether any extra precautions need to be taken because of treatment or side effects. For example, someone who is at risk for bleeding issues due to low platelet count may need to refrain from sex until platelet numbers improve. If your loved one is receiving radioimmunotherapy treatment, it may be necessary to take precautions to protect yourself from exposure to radiation. (With external beam radiation therapy, people in contact with the patient, such as the caregiver, will not be exposed to any radiation.)

Use proper protection.

If you continue to have sex during your loved one's treatment, be sure to use proper protection. Pregnancy during chemotherapy or radiation is not safe for either the mother or the child. Always use a form of birth control. Since cancer treatment can compromise the immune system, use condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

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.



Caring for a parent

When you are caring for a parent, the role reversal may feel odd at first. For most of your life, your parent may have filled the caregiver role in your relationship. Your parent may be reluctant to accept care and not want to be a burden.

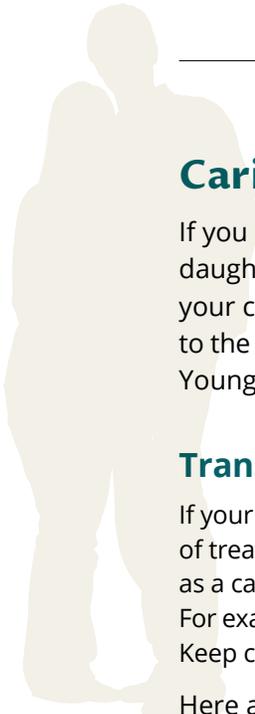
Your parent may struggle with the challenges of aging and losing independence. Try to remember that this role reversal may be uncomfortable for both of you.

If you have a spouse or partner,

devoting more of your time to care for your parent may leave less time for you to focus on your relationship with your partner. Try to set aside regular time for you and your partner to be alone even if it is only to share a cup of coffee in the morning.

If you have young children yourself,

your co-parent may need to take on more childcare responsibility while you are looking after your own parent, which could lead to feelings of resentment. Reach out to family and friends to help with childcare responsibilities so that they do not all fall to the other parent.



Caring for a young adult

If you are a parent caring for an adult child who has a cancer diagnosis, remember that your son or daughter is an adult. You must respect his or her decisions regarding treatment. Providing care for your child may feel natural for you, but if your son or daughter had been living independently prior to the diagnosis, being dependent on the care of a parent again may feel frustrating and infantilizing. Young adults often face challenges specific to their age-group, both during and after treatment.

Transitioning after your child becomes a legal adult

If your child was diagnosed with cancer at a younger age but becomes a legal adult during the course of treatment, you need to be aware of how this may change the dynamic of your relationship and role as a caregiver. Ask your young adult what changes in responsibility he or she would like to explore. For example, taking on more responsibilities such as scheduling appointments or picking up prescriptions. Keep communication open and ongoing.

Here are some things to keep in mind.

Permission

As a legal adult, your young adult will need to sign a waiver to grant members of the healthcare team permission to discuss his or her medical care with you and to allow you access to his or her medical records.

Decision maker

Your young adult will need to determine who will be the primary decision maker for his or her continued medical care. Some young adults may feel more comfortable leaving their parents in charge of their care. Other young adults may wish to take a more active role. You may need to step back and allow him or her to make decisions. Either way, be respectful of your young adult's wishes. Remind your young adult to tell members of the healthcare team who will be the main point of contact.





Advocating for oneself

Teach your young adult how to advocate for his or her own care. Even if you remain the primary decision maker for your young adult's medical care, it is important for all persons to learn how to advocate for themselves.

Communication

Encourage your young adult to communicate openly and honestly with members of the healthcare team and to ask questions. (See fact sheet **Communicating as a Caregiver** for tips on communicating with members of the healthcare team.)

Resources

Provide resources for your young adult to learn more about his or her medical needs. Ask members of the healthcare team for written information. Show him or her how to access medical records. Inform him or her of any family history of disease.

Medications

Teach your young adult to take all medications as prescribed. Suggest setting a reminder on a mobile phone. Make sure your young adult knows the names of all his or her medications and how and when to take them, including vitamins and supplements. Remind him or her to take a list of these medications to every appointment.



Get the LLS Health Manager app

Track and set reminders for medications.



Privacy

Be aware that there may be times when young adults will want to talk to members of their healthcare team alone to discuss sensitive matters that they may not wish to discuss in front of a parent, such as sexual activity or alcohol or drug use. Give your young adult the space he or she needs to have private discussions with the healthcare team.



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1 833 222-4884 • info@bloodcancers.ca • bloodcancers.ca