



## Caring for the Caregiver

**T**aking care of a loved one who has a serious illness or disability is a heroic but stressful undertaking, both physically and mentally. If you are one of these caregivers, you are not alone. There are an estimated 44.4 million unpaid caregivers in the United States.

Too often, caregivers feel that they cannot take the time to care for themselves. But caregivers are at increased risk for depression, infections such as colds and flu, and chronic diseases such as heart problems, diabetes, and cancer, according to the Department of Health and Human Resources Administration on Aging. Depression is twice as common among caregivers as it is in those without this challenging responsibility.

Clearly, caregivers need to find ways to look after themselves. Here are a few suggestions:

■ **Make your own health a priority.**

Get a yearly checkup, a flu shot, and cancer screenings as recommended by your doctor. Tell your doctor if you feel depressed or extremely anxious.

■ **Get enough sleep, eat balanced meals, and exercise regularly.**

Being healthy and well rested improves your physical and emotional strength for caregiving.

■ **Find support from people in the same boat.**

You could join a caregiver support group in the community or the hospital where your loved one is being treated. Or you could share experiences with other caregivers on the Internet. Communicating with others facing similar problems allows you to vent frustrations, exchange solutions, and receive comfort and support.

■ **Ask for help.** You can't do everything yourself, and you don't have to.



### Online Resources for Cancer Caregivers

**The Anderson Network**  
[www.mdanderson.org/andersonnetwork](http://www.mdanderson.org/andersonnetwork)

Patient and caregiver support program run by M. D. Anderson's Department of Volunteer Services offers a newsletter, a message board, a video for caregivers, an online support group called WarmNet, and information on support groups that meet weekly at M. D. Anderson

**Caregiver.com**

Offers information, chat rooms, and discussion forums

**FamilyCaregiving101.org**

Helps caregivers protect their own health

**National Family Caregivers Association**

[www.nfcares.org](http://www.nfcares.org)

Provides caregiver news and a message board

Make a list of tasks others can do for you, such as run an errand, prepare a meal, or babysit your children while you go to a doctor's appointment. Enlist the help of your family, friends, and neighbors.

■ **Tell someone you trust how you're feeling.**

It's normal to feel overwhelmed by your expanded and sometimes sudden responsibilities or to sometimes feel angry with the patient you're caring for. Talking with a friend, a relative, a clergy member, or another caregiver can help you gain a better perspective and alleviate intense feelings,

such as sadness, guilt, or fear. The Anderson Network, a cancer patient and caregiver support program run by M. D. Anderson's Department of Volunteer Services, has a telephone support line that will make arrangements for another caregiver to call you within 24 to 48 hours. Also, a pediatric caregiver telephone support network has been set up specifically for people taking care of children with cancer. You can reach both support lines at 1-800-345-6324.

■ **Do something for yourself every day.**

Even if it's only taking a short walk, reading a magazine, phoning a friend, pursuing a hobby, or writing in your journal, doing something that is pleasurable to you will restore your strength for the next day. Treat yourself to dinner or a movie with friends. Practicing meditation or regularly breathing deeply can help you relax.

■ **Use resources available through independent and government agencies.**

Home care agencies can often provide medical equipment and a variety of services, such as preparing meals, delivering medication, and helping the patient bathe, eat, or dress. Your state or local health department and the American Cancer Society can help you locate available services. The American Cancer Society also has a volunteer program, Road to Recovery, that transports patients to their treatment appointments.

No matter what you do to stay healthy, always remember that taking care of yourself is as important and medically necessary as taking care of your loved one. ●

*For more information, talk to your physician, or:*

- call askMDAnderson at 1-877-632-6789
- visit [www.mdanderson.org](http://www.mdanderson.org)

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