

Taking Care of You As a Caregiver

At some point a person with advanced cancer or another terminal illness will likely need 24/7 care. Make sure you have helpers ready to share the responsibility.

Eat well by having nutritious meals on a regular schedule. Make sure to have nutritious snacks available. Cook in large quantities and freeze meals for later.

Exercise regularly; even walking once a day will help with energy and reduce stress.

Get enough rest and allow time for chores and medical appointments.

Use coping skills such as taking breaks and talking to someone to help manage personal feelings of grief, sadness or anger. Accept that although your loved one is reaching the end of their life, this can be a special time of love as you help them prepare to go on their journey. Special memories or funny stories you and other family members or friends can share with your loved one will help them and you as caregivers.

Check yourself from time to time to be sure you are getting enough to eat and enough rest, and are not feeling exhausted.

In Your Community

For more information about palliative care, talk to your health care provider (e.g. doctor, specialist, or nurse) or community health worker (e.g. home support worker).

Your health care provider or community health worker can also provide more resources with information and support, including information from Cancer Care Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society.



Taking Care of Your Loved One



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Caregivers are people who provide unpaid care and help to family members or friends. The care that they provide can be hands-on care, emotional support or act as a patient advocate. The role of the caregiver can look different depending on the situation.

If your loved one is in the advanced stages of cancer or another terminal illness and you are their caregiver or are planning to be their caregiver:

- Talk to your loved one about where they want to be cared for: at home; in a hospice; in the hospital; or in a long-term care facility
- Make other family members aware of choices they have made
- If your loved one chooses to be at home, ask family members and close friends who want to help, to commit to a certain amount of time. They could help with: bathing, feeding, or other personal care; or support tasks such as cleaning, cooking, child care, laundry, getting groceries, or coordinating helpers and visitors

*“When the family gets involved,
it lifts the spirit of the person
– the love helps them.”*

Some Do's for Caregivers

- Make a schedule for yourself and others, in blocks of time: caregiving, time off and time for sleep and personal care. This will help prevent burn out. Knowing others are there will allow you to relax and go out for a break when needed
- Ask your community health workers (e.g. home support worker) to help get any equipment that will be needed (e.g. hospital bed, bath chair, walker, special mattress)
- Remember that the love and respect you have for your loved one will guide you in caring for them at this time
- Ask for help in learning basic caregiving skills that can help your loved one to be more comfortable and prevent problems e.g. bed-baths, toileting, positioning in bed, mouth care
- If your loved one wants to talk about things they have never spoken about before, or if they need to cry, it is important to let them express themselves and to listen
- Try to offer uplifting words and caring gestures or a gentle touch to let them know they are not alone
- Conversation is not always necessary; just being there can be a comfort to them
- Pay attention to body language; for example, if they are in pain they might be frowning or curled up in a fetal position
- Try not to take their anger personally. If they are having a hard time accepting their condition or have unresolved issues they may be angry but you are not to blame. They may also be irritable due to shortness of breath, a common occurrence at the end of life

Basic caregiving skills also include feeding, giving pain medications and providing social and emotional support. These and other caregiving skills are described in detail in handbooks such as *Caring for the Terminally Ill: Honouring the Choices of the People* by Barb Linkewich, Josephine Potson, Veronica Fobister and Wilma Sletmoen; and *A Caregiver's Guide: A Handbook About End-of-Life Care*, by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. Ask your community health workers or health care providers to help you get copies of these or other resource books.