

# Taking Care of Someone Who Is Ill

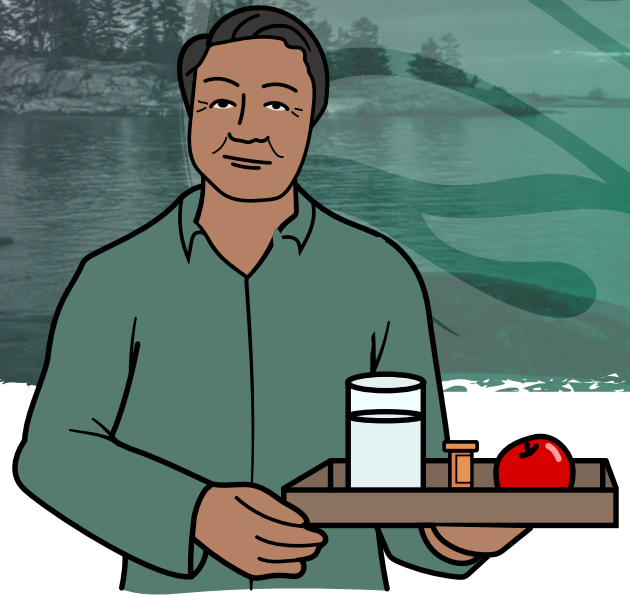
## Are you caring for a family member or friend that is seriously ill?

Caregivers are people who provide unpaid care and help family members or friends who are seriously ill. Their care can be hands-on; emotional, mental, and spiritual support; or acting as patient advocates. The role of the caregiver can look different depending on the situation.

Being a caregiver can be very stressful, tiring, and emotional for so many reasons.

## Here are some things to consider as you care for someone:


- As hard as it may be, it is important to respect their choices as it is their journey.
- Ask to review their goals of care and plan of treatment together so you can be fully aware of their goals and wishes during this time. Both are available from their health care provider upon request. If they have not yet created their goals of care or plan of treatment, talk to their health care provider about creating them.
- Talk to your family member or friend and their health care team about what kind of care they will need and how this may shift as their illness progresses.
- If you live in a rural or remote community with no hospice, hospital, or long-term care facility, talk to the health care staff in your community about what will happen if care needs to be provided in one of these facilities, away from home.
- Encourage the person you are caring for to make other family members or friends aware of their choices.
- If they choose to be at home, ask if there are other family members or close friends that they would be comfortable with helping in their care. Then, ask these people if they can commit to a certain amount of time to help with care. Some things they can help with include bathing, feeding, cleaning, cooking, childcare, laundry, getting groceries, emotional support, spiritual support, coordinating helpers and visitors, etc.
- 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 caregiver burnout. 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 and community care worker) to help get any equipment that will be needed (e.g., hospital bed, bath chair, walker, special mattress, etc.).
- If possible, ask friends, family and/or community members for help in learning basic caregiving skills to help the person you are caring for be more comfortable and prevent problems (e.g., bed baths, toileting, positioning in bed, mouth care, etc.).
- Work with the pharmacist to keep a printed sheet of medications for the person you are caring for.
- Connect with supports and resources to help you navigate the health system. You do not need to navigate the system alone. The Indigenous Patient Navigators and Indigenous Cancer Navigators are there to support you.



## Providing Wholistic Support

Caring for someone who is ill involves more than just making sure that the logistics are taken care of, and their physical needs are met. Caregivers often also provide or facilitate mental, emotional, and spiritual support to ensure wholistic wellness.

### Here are some things to consider:

- If the person you are caring for wants to talk about things they have never spoken about before or needs to cry, it is important to try to let them express themselves and listen.
  - Try to offer uplifting words, caring gestures, or a gentle touch to let them know they are not alone.
  - Conversation is not always necessary; just being there can comfort them.
  - Pay attention to body language; they may not always tell you they are in pain.
  - Reflect on their goals of care and/or plan of treatment to identify options for mental and emotional support other than yourself. This may be a counsellor, an Elder, etc.
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- If the person you are caring for is having a hard time accepting their condition or has unresolved issues, they may be angry, but you are not to blame. Try not to take their anger personally. They may also be irritable due to pain and symptoms from the illness, a common occurrence at the end of life.
  - Ask the person you are caring for how or if they would like to receive mental, emotional, and/or spiritual support.

## Taking Care of You

Being a caregiver can take up a lot of your energy and time, especially as the condition of the person you are caring for worsens. You are important too and you cannot forget about yourself. You cannot care for others when you are unwell.

### Here are some things you can do to take care of your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness:

- 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 (e.g., Elder, family member, friend, etc.) to help manage personal feelings of grief, sadness or anger. Accept that although your friend or family member 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 that you and other family members or friends can share will help during this time.
  - Check on yourself from time to time to make sure you are getting enough to eat, enough rest and are not feeling exhausted. Ask for help with tasks (e.g., meals, transport, etc.) if you need it.

## Resources

**Indigenous Cancer Navigators** can support you and your family along the cancer journey.

» [cancercareontario.ca/en/find-cancer-services/indigenous-navigators](https://cancercareontario.ca/en/find-cancer-services/indigenous-navigators)

**Indigenous Patient Navigators** can support you and your family to navigate the health care system. Ask your health care provider if there is an Indigenous Patient Navigator in the hospital where you will be receiving care.

**Canadian Virtual Hospice Living My Culture** is a platform where people from different cultures share their stories and wisdom about living with illness, end-of-life, and grief.

» [livingmyculture.ca/culture/](https://livingmyculture.ca/culture/)

**Respite Care** provides relief caregiving so you can take a break.

» [ontario.ca/page/respice-care](https://ontario.ca/page/respice-care)

**Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health** has many resources for Indigenous caregivers and other resources.

» [cerah.lakeheadu.ca/resources/indigenous-health](https://cerah.lakeheadu.ca/resources/indigenous-health)

**The Ontario Caregiver Organization** offers many supports and programs for caregivers, including information on financial supports.

» Call **1-833-416-2273** or connect to the online chat at [ontariocaregiver.ca](https://ontariocaregiver.ca)

**Ontario Health atHome** keeps a list of resources for caregivers.

» [ontariohealthathome.ca/resources-for-caregivers/](https://ontariohealthathome.ca/resources-for-caregivers/)

**Hope for Wellness** is a free 24/7 culturally safe resource to support you and the people you care about with mental health.

» Call **1-855-242-3310** or connect to the online chat at [hopeforwellness.ca](https://hopeforwellness.ca)

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

### Need this information in an accessible format?

1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, [info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca)

Document disponible en français en contactant [info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca).

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The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada or the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.