

# Take care of yourself too

## A care partner resource

### What have you done to take care of yourself today?

Your ability to help is impacted by how you feel. This resource will help you understand why taking care of yourself is an important piece of the puzzle, how to recognize signs of stress, and what to do about it.

### A care partner is

- A companion, a helper and a sounding board
- Someone who helps with physical or emotional support
- An essential member of the care team
- You

### The role of a care partner

Being a care partner for someone living with cancer can mean different things. What they need from you may depend on where they are in their treatment and how they are feeling physically and emotionally.

Additionally, their needs may change over time. One day they may need someone to go to the doctor with them and the next they may need someone to pick up a few groceries.

Or they may simply need someone to talk to.

### Recognizing care partner fatigue

The partnership of care can be very rewarding. It feels nice to be able help someone you care about. But that doesn't mean it is always easy. Care partners can experience stress related to their role. Care partner fatigue, the long-term effect of that stress, can be easy to overlook.

#### Signs of care partner fatigue include:

- Changes in sleep, such as sleeping too much or too little
- Constantly feeling worried or overwhelmed
- Changes in eating habits
- Losing interest in activities that used to bring joy
- Regularly feeling sad or depressed
- Frequent headaches
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs, including prescription medication
- Delaying personal health needs

If you believe you may have depression, seek professional help.

Sound familiar? You are not alone. Care partner fatigue, also referred to as caregiver stress and burnout, is common. Moreover, in a survey done by The National Alliance for Caregiving, over half of those surveyed reported moderate to high stress around their role as a caregiver.

Your risks increase if you already have depression, live with the person you care for, are socially isolated, or have

financial difficulties. Additionally, your risk increases the longer you provide care. The good news is that there are many ways to address and prevent care partner fatigue.

Now that you know the symptoms to look out for, read on to create your plan to take care of yourself.



## Preventing care partner fatigue

What can you do to prevent care partner fatigue in the first place? Start by remembering that you have needs too. It is not selfish to also take care of yourself. You will be a more effective care partner if you are physically and emotionally healthy.

Taking time for yourself is important. How you feel can affect your role as care partner. Setting aside time for yourself can help you feel more resilient, and having more resilience means you have additional resources to cope. That way, when life doesn't go exactly as planned, you may be able to adapt more easily.

## Plan regular activities that are just for you.

Perhaps it is getting coffee with a friend, getting exercise at the gym or taking a hike outside. Listen to music that makes you feel happy or calm. Join a club or peer group that interests you.

## Add mindfulness to your routine.

Mindfulness is not a spiritual practice, but one designed to train the mind. Many conditions can be positively impacted through the practice of mindfulness. Activities like mindful breathing or walking may help issues like depression, anxiety and issues with sleep. It is not a substitute for conventional care, but it could be added to your plans for taking care of yourself.

## Make sure you take care of your own health.

When was the last time you visited a dentist? How about your last physical? Do you have any health issues you have put on the back burner? Make sure you are getting enough rest, eating healthy foods and getting regular physical activity. Now is a great time to start making a plan to take care of yourself.

## Go outside.

Spending time in nature can help you think more clearly. Stop. Breathe. Listen. Take a little bit of time to sit and enjoy. Think about ways you could integrate more time outdoors into your day.



## If you think you have care partner fatigue

First, take a deep breath. You are certainly not alone in feeling this way. Start by giving yourself permission to experience the full range of emotions. Feeling sad or frustrated is normal. You have the power to choose how you respond. You can choose healthy, productive ways to address how you feel.

This short list may give you some ideas. Which ones could you consider trying? What else could you add to that list?



### Take a break.

Give yourself an hour or two of rest. Stay in bed and read. Take a few minutes to stop and stretch. Or plan for ways to treat yourself. Everyone needs a break sometimes. Schedule regular breaks so you have something to look forward to.



### Talk to someone.

Consider joining a support group or check out an organization specifically for care partners. Being surrounded by people with a similar experience can help you process how you feel, provide an outlet for your emotions, and also give you new ideas for addressing issues commonly experienced by care partners. Support groups not for you? Find a trusted friend with whom you feel comfortable sharing how you feel. Vent. Process. Hug.



### Physical activity.

Regular exercise has many benefits, including improving your mood. Whether you go for a walk, play tennis, work in the garden, or do another physical activity you enjoy, consider adding exercise to your routine.



### Seek help. Accept help when it is offered.

It can feel hard to ask for help or accept it when offered. Consider ways to reach out to your support network to ask for help on things that will be simple for them to do but will give you time and energy to spend elsewhere. Make a list of things such as walking the dog after a day at the doctor's office or changing a lightbulb on the porch. When someone offers to help, ask for help from that list of activities. It will likely make that person's day.



### Plan activities.

Think about activities that bring you joy. Reading. Watching baseball. Going to the movies with a friend. You may have put off these activities lately. Make a plan to do something fun for yourself.



### Make a plan.

Having a specific plan to take care of yourself may make you more likely to actually do it.

# Make a plan

What are things you could do today to care for yourself?

Start by making a list of activities you like. When could you do that activity? Be specific and write it down here or add it to your calendar.

Activities I like are

Example: *Getting coffee with a friend*

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I can

Example: *Call Mark today. See if he's available on Sunday afternoon.*

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Asking for and accepting help can be hard.

Start thinking about who you could ask if you need a hand. Your support network may have changed over time. People may not know that you could use some help or not know what you need. Identify a few people you could reach out to for help.

I could ask

Example: *Cynthia*

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To help with

Example: *Picking up groceries*

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I could ask by

Example: *Calling or texting*

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# Make a plan

Finally, think about your personal health.

Make sure you have appointments for yourself to visit the doctor, dentist and any specialists you see.

My next visit to the doctor is:

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My next visit to the dentist is:

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My next haircut is:

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I can work toward a healthier me by:

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Other appointments I have are:

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For more support for care partners, visit:

National Alliance for Caregiving | [caregiving.org](https://caregiving.org)

MyLifeLine.org Cancer Foundation | [mylifeline.org](https://mylifeline.org)

Sharsheret | [sharsheret.org](https://sharsheret.org)

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