



Caring for Yourself

By: [CVH Team](#)

Whether you are caring for someone full-time or even just occasionally helping out, caregiving can be mentally, physically and emotionally demanding. Although taking time for yourself is often easier said than done, pushing yourself to do more, with less rest, may put you at risk for becoming sick. Your physical and emotional exhaustion may cause additional stress for the person who is ill. Ultimately, you might become unable to care for the person with illness.

Here are some tips on how to take care of yourself.

Take a break

One of the best ways to ensure that you do not run low on energy in your role as a caregiver is to take regular breaks and do something that you enjoy. Try to take time for yourself at least once a week. Maybe you'll go to a movie, take a walk, go for a bike ride or have an afternoon nap. You may want to go to a restaurant or go for a walk with someone, so that you have time to talk away from the care environment. You may only feel comfortable taking a break if someone else is able to stay with the ill person.

Accept help from others

Take advantage of the help that friends and other family members may offer. They may need specific suggestions from you, as they may not know what would be most helpful for you. Perhaps you can ask a friend to go on an outing with you, pick up some groceries for you, mow the lawn or take the dog for a walk. If you are caring for someone in your home, you might suggest to your friends that they sit with the ill person while you run some errands, or even look after other things in the home. You may find great relief just in knowing that someone else is looking after even the simple tasks, like getting a drink of water or tracking down a phone or eyeglasses for the person with illness, leaving you free to do other things. If there is a [hospice](#) or [palliative care](#) program in your area, you may be able to ask for a volunteer or [respite](#) worker to come into your home to give you a break.

Juggling caregiving with work

Whether you are caring for someone in the home or providing occasional care in hospital or hospice, you will likely be juggling several obligations. These obligations may include working, caring for children, caring for aging parents or looking after other matters related to home life.

People differ in the ways in which they deal with these competing demands. Some people find that going to work gives them a break from their caregiver role and helps them re-energize, so that they can better focus on the person who is ill when they get home. Others may find that the demands of work outside the home combined with caregiver responsibilities are too much to manage. Still others may feel stressed because they cannot afford to leave work in order to care for someone. If you are considering taking time off work to care for someone, you should know about Canadian government benefits, such as [Compassionate Care Benefits](#), which are available to you as a caregiver.

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See also: [Caregiver and Survivor Benefits](#)

Look after yourself

Caregivers often say they put their lives on hold while they look after someone. If you are caring for someone, try to stick to a schedule that ensures that you eat and sleep regularly. If you are always pushing back your bed time and eating meals hours after you first became hungry, your health will suffer. Keeping simple snacks on hand might be one way to ensure that you are always able to eat regularly.

If you are feeling tired, you might want to plan to sleep whenever the person you are caring for is sleeping, even if that means leaving some chores unfinished. Draw upon whatever resources are available to you to help you with household tasks, so that you do not become exhausted. If you need to visit a doctor or clinic for a health concern, try not to put off the visit until you have more time.

Keep your back healthy

In your role as a care provider, you may be required to help lift, transfer, or reposition an ill person. It is important to keep your back healthy and strong to decrease the likelihood of a back injury. Exercise such as walking or swimming can increase strength in your lower back and help your muscles function better. You may also want to consider abdominal exercises to help support your back.

When you are lifting someone, try to let your legs do the work. Keep your back straight and bend only at the knees. Keep the person you are helping to move as tight to your body as possible. Avoid lifting and twisting at the same time.

If you are sitting for long periods at a time, make sure the chair has good lower back support or put a pillow or rolled towel in the small of your back to help it keep its shape. Your thighs should be parallel to the floor.

If you need to stand for long periods of time, place one foot on a low footstool to take some of the pressure off your back.

If the person is not able to lift much of their weight at all, you may want to do the major moves – such as helping the person move from bed to chair – when someone else is there to help. It is much easier for two people to help someone move around than it is for one person. Protecting your back from injury will help to ensure that you are able to continue to help caring for the person who is ill.

If the person should fall down, your first instinct may be to help the person get up again. Lifting someone up off the floor can be very difficult. If you are not very strong, it may be safer for the person to remain on the floor until you can get help from someone else. You can put a pillow under the person's head and help them into a comfortable position until help arrives.

Questions of safety

If the person with an illness has become confused, they may become argumentative or in rare cases, even combative. You should get help if you feel that your physical safety is threatened. The patient may need a change in medication or you may need to consider arrangements for alternative care if care is currently provided at home. This may mean admission to a hospice, palliative care unit or hospital.
See also: [Confusion](#)

For more information about caregiver needs, see [Module 4](#) of the Caregiver Series.

For additional resources and tools to support you in your caregiving role visit [CaregiversCAN](#).

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