

SELF-CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

Why it is important

Caregivers are very important to the care of patients with a serious or life-threatening illness. More than 70% of people who die have had care from family caregivers. Caring for a loved one who is seriously ill can be very hard work. You can only do this work if you take time to take care of yourself. Self-care is about meeting your own needs so you feel able to be a good caregiver to your loved one. Providing this care can be very stressful for caregivers. Some helpful suggestions include the following.

Physical Needs

- Remember to take care of your own health
- Keep your own doctor appointments
- Schedule time to eat. Have at least 3 healthy but simple meals a day
- Learn to make meals in advance.
Ask friends/family if they could help with making meals
- Ask how best to provide care to your loved one and prevent injuring yourself
- Take time to rest, especially if sleeping has become hard for you
- Avoid/limit the use of tobacco and alcohol as they may make it difficult to fall asleep
- Try to get some form of exercise in the day
- Take time alone. This can include walking, reading, listening to music, baths, praying, gardening, etc.

Communication Needs

Tell people about your worries. These people may be family, friends, or some of the healthcare providers working with you to help you care for your loved one

Be informed! Ask what signs and symptoms to expect from the patient so that you are prepared to deal with them

Get organized and set realistic goals for your day. Keep it real and be flexible. Set limits

Ask others to help with whatever you or your loved one needs

Always know about the hospice visits and any changes in that schedule

Emotional/Spiritual Needs

Keep relationships with family and friends to avoid feeling alone. If it is difficult for you to get out, ask people to come to visit. Let people take care of you and allow your loved one to say thank you for all you do

Work with your team to provide time to get out of the home to enjoy social activities or attend support groups. When possible, keep doing favorite activities. Try to keep things simple

Talk about your fears about what is happening to your loved one. Also, talk about any concerns or frustrations you may have

Even though you are feeling stressed, tell yourself everyday you are doing a great job

Let your hospice/palliative staff know if you are feeling overwhelmed. Your team has ways to help, including nursing assistants and other resources

Attend to your spiritual needs by calling or visiting your clergy, church or synagogue

Have your own "special space." This can be your room, a chair, a table, etc. Someplace that is only yours where you can go to unwind

Seek additional professional help if you are feeling scared, helpless, lost, or depressed

Breathe and laugh

Other HPNA Patient Family Teaching Sheets are available at www.hpna.org.

Reference

Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2005.

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