

Caring for someone with cancer

Information for friends and family
who provide care and support

We prepared this fact sheet to help people who are looking after someone with cancer. Caring can be very rewarding, but many people also find it hard. We hope this information can help you understand more about your role as a carer, how to look after yourself and the support services out there.

Who is a carer?

A carer is someone who gives unpaid care and support to a person who needs their help because of illness, disability or ageing.

Carers may be family, friends or a neighbour. You may not see yourself as a carer. You may think you are simply helping as a normal part of your relationship.

Some carers provide support 24 hours a day. Other carers visit for a few hours a week to help or organise care by phone, email or the internet. Sometimes a carer lives a long way away. The amount and type of care might change over time. Caring can be more than a one-person job.

Some people are happy to be carers and feel very close to the person they are caring for. Other people don't and feel they have to provide care.

Some carers have other responsibilities, such as young children or a demanding job or studies.

What carers do

Caring may involve:

- helping with cooking meals, shopping, transport and hygiene
- managing bank accounts, bills and money
- organising and attending medical appointments
- communicating updates with family and friends
- providing basic health care, including giving medicines
- providing emotional or spiritual support.

Carers often experience new challenges. At first, some things may seem too hard to do, like helping with medicines. Over time, most carers say they are surprised at how much they can do. They get satisfaction from realising how much help they can give.

Important skills include knowing how to listen, when to talk and when 'being there' is all that the person with cancer needs. Most carers have these skills without knowing it.

Sometimes you might feel worried about what's expected from you. If you are finding it difficult to be a carer, do what you can. Ask for help when you need to.

Contact Carers Victoria who can offer support and advice or call Cancer Council 13 11 20 to speak with a cancer nurse. To speak with a cancer nurse in your own language call 13 14 50.

How carers feel

It is normal to feel lots of emotions when you are a carer, and those feelings can change over time. Often carers feel similar emotions to those felt by the person with cancer.

Common feelings are:

- satisfaction
- love
- worry
- anger
- frustration
- stress
- guilt
- loneliness
- depression
- helplessness
- loss and grief.

Caring for yourself

Caring can be rewarding, but it may also be hard at times. Many people say that being a carer can affect their health and wellbeing, relationships, careers and finances.

Many carers ignore their own needs. You might think it is selfish to think about yourself. Looking after yourself is important, it will help you provide better care for a longer period of time.

Ways to look after yourself:



Accept help



Talk to someone you trust



Exercise regularly



Eat a healthy diet



Join a support group



Speak to your GP



Take a break

Taking a break (respite care)

Respite care gives carers a chance to have a break. It is offered in a number of different types of respite facilities including residential care facilities or palliative care units or at home. Respite options will depend on what is available in your area. Respite can be for a few hours, overnight or a few days.

You might not want to use respite care because you feel guilty or anxious about leaving the person you care for. However, taking a break means that you will probably be able to be a better carer for longer. The person you are caring for can also have a break and be with other people.

Most respite options will involve a cost and the Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres can connect you with respite and support services around Australia. Call 1800 052 222 during business hours or 1800 059 059 for emergency support outside business hours.

Your medical team may also be able to help you find and choose care. They may be able to help you plan respite care that meets the needs of you, your family and the person you are caring for. They may be able to help you organise bookings and find out if financial help is available.

Financial assistance

Caring for someone can cause financial strain. Household income will drop if you or the person you are caring for needs to work less hours or stop working. There may also be new expenses.

Speak to a social worker, Carers Victoria or Cancer Council to find out what financial help is available.

The Department of Human Services offers a free, private Financial Information Service that provides support on financial issues; call 13 23 00.

More information and support

There are many services available to support carers emotionally, physically and financially.

Cancer Council Victoria Family Connect

13 11 20

cancervic.org.au/get-support/connect-and-learn/cancer_connect

Phone support from someone who has been there before.

Carer Gateway

1800 422 737

carergateway.gov.au

An Australian Government service that provides information and resources for carers. Provides links to support services in your local area.

Carers Victoria

1800 514 845

carersvictoria.org.au

A not-for-profit organisation which provides advice, information and support to carers to improve their health, wellbeing, capacity and resilience.

Victorian Carer Card

A discounts and benefits card for unpaid primary carers in Victoria.

Young Carers

1800 514 845

Supports young people (25 and under) who care for a family member or friend.

Respite

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres

1800 052 222 during business hours

1800 059 059 for emergency respite

Provide information about respite services, which may be available at home, in a respite care centre or, in some cases, in a hospital or palliative care unit (hospice).

Financial

Department of Human Services

13 23 00

Offers a free, private Financial Information Service that provides support on financial issues.

Centrelink

13 27 17

Multilingual Service 13 12 02

May be able to provide financial assistance such as carer payments or concession cards from Centrelink.

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Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This fact sheet is intended as a general introduction and is not a substitute for professional medical, legal or financial advice. Information about cancer is constantly being updated and revised by the medical and research communities. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.

For information and support contact a cancer nurse



13 11 20



askanurse@cancervic.org.au



www.cancervic.org.au



For other languages call 13 14 50