

NETCARE
cancer care

Caring for YOU the caregiver

Helping you
navigate the cancer
journey as a caregiver,
with information and support



It happens in an instant

Your loved one received the diagnosis. It's cancer. And just like that, both of your lives are forever changed. Your loved one now begins the hardest journey of their life. But your cancer journey begins, too. You have become the emotional supporter and physical caretaker. You are now a caregiver.

This booklet will give you some helpful information on navigating this journey with your loved one.



1. Who is a caregiver?

Are you helping a loved one get through cancer treatment? If you are, then this booklet is for you. You are a "caregiver." You may not think of yourself as a caregiver. You may not even want to be a caregiver. Or you may feel you are doing something natural. You are just caring for someone you love. Some caregivers are family members. Others are friends.

a. What does "giving care" mean?

Giving care can mean helping with daily needs. These include going to doctor visits, making meals and picking up medicines. It can also mean helping your loved one cope with feelings, like when they feel sad or angry. Sometimes having someone to talk to is what your loved one needs most. While giving care, it's normal to put your own needs and feelings aside but putting them aside for a long time is not good for your health. You need to take care of yourself, too.

A new role

Whether younger or older, you may find yourself in a new role as a caregiver. You may have been part of someone's life before cancer, but maybe now the way you support that person is changing. Whatever your roles are now, it's normal to feel confused and stressed at this time.

If caregiving feels new to you, try not to worry. Many caregivers say that they learn more as they go through their loved one's cancer treatment. And if you need to, try to share your feelings with friends, a support group or anyone you feel comfortable with. Many caregivers say that talking with others helped them, they feel they were able to say things that they couldn't always say to their loved ones.

2. Your feelings

It's common to feel stressed and overwhelmed at this time. Like your loved one, you may feel angry, sad or worried, try to share your feelings with others who can help you. It can help to talk about how you feel. You can even talk to a social worker or a psychologist.

a. Understanding your feelings

You probably have many feelings as you take care of your loved one. There is no right way for you to feel. Each person is different. The first step to understanding your feelings is knowing that they're normal. Give yourself some time to think through them.

Some feelings that may come and go are:

- Sadness. It's okay to feel sad. But if it lasts more than two weeks and keeps you from doing what you need to do, speak to your doctor.
- Anger. You may be angry at yourself or your family members. You may be angry at the person you're caring for. Know that anger often comes from fear, panic or stress. Try to look at what is beneath the anger.
- Grief. You may be feeling a loss of what you value most. This may be your loved one's health, or the loss of the day-to-day life you had before the cancer was diagnosed. Let yourself grieve these losses.
- Guilt. Feeling guilty is common, too. You may think you aren't helping enough, or you may feel guilty that you are healthy.
- Loneliness. You can feel lonely, even with lots of people around you. You may think that no one understands your problems. You may also be spending less time with others.

Here are some other things that may help you:

- Forgive yourself. We all make mistakes whenever we have a lot on our minds. No one is perfect, and chances are that you're doing what you can at this moment.
- Cry or express your feelings. You don't have to pretend to be cheerful. It's okay to show that you are sad or upset.
- Focus on things that are worth your time and energy. Let small things go for now. For example, don't fold clothes if you are tired.
- Don't take your loved one's anger personally. It's very common for people to direct their feelings at those who are closest. Their stress, fears, and worries may come out as anger.
- Be hopeful. What you hope for may change over time. But you can always hope for comfort, joy, acceptance and peace.

3. Asking for help



Many people who were once caregivers say they did too much on their own. Some wished that they had asked for help sooner.

Accepting help from others isn't always easy. When tough things happen, many people tend to pull away. They think, "We can handle this on our own." But things can get harder as the patient goes through treatment. As a result, many caregivers have said, "There's just too much on my plate."

Take a look at how busy you are now. Be honest with yourself about what you can do. Think about tasks you can give to others. Let go of tasks that aren't as important right now.

Asking for help also helps your loved one. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Remember, if you get help for yourself:

- You may stay healthier and have more energy
- Your loved one may feel less guilty about your help
- Other helpers may offer time and skills that you don't have

4. Caring for yourself

a. Make time for yourself

You may feel that your needs aren't important right now. Or that you've spent so much time caring for your loved one and there's no time left for yourself.

Taking time for yourself can help you be a better caregiver. Caring for your needs and desires is important to give you the strength to carry on. This is even more true if you have health problems.

You may want to:

- Find nice things you can do for yourself. Even just a few minutes can help. You could watch TV, call a friend, work on a hobby or do anything you enjoy.
- Be active. Light exercise such as walking, stretching, or dancing can energize you. Playing with kids or pets will also lift your spirits.
- Find ways to connect with friends. Are there places near you where you can meet up, or can you catch up on a call?
- Give yourself more time off. Ask friends or family members to pitch in. Take time to rest. Do something for yourself each day. It doesn't matter how small it is. Whatever you do, don't neglect yourself.

b. Caring for your body

You may feel too busy or worried about your loved one to think about your own health, and yet it's common for caregivers to have sleep problems, headaches, and anxiety, along with other issues. But if you take care of yourself, you can have the strength to care for someone else.

Did you have health problems before you became a caregiver? If so, now it's even more important to take care of yourself.

Also, adding extra stressors to your life can cause new health problems. Be sure to tell your doctor if you notice any changes in your body.





Keep up with your own health needs. Try to:

- Go for all your health checkups (e.g. your mammogram, or GP visit)
- Take your medicines
- Eat healthy meals
- Get enough rest
- Exercise
- Make time to relax

This might sound easy, but it can be challenging for caregivers to pay attention to their own bodies and minds.

c. Finding meaning during cancer

Cancer causes many caregivers to look at life in new ways. They think about life's purpose and often focus on what they value most. You and your loved one may question why cancer has come into your lives. You may long for things to be like they were before the disease. It's also normal to see the positive effects alongside the negative, like it bringing you closer.

Cancer can affect one's faith in different ways. Some people turn towards their beliefs. Others turn away from them. It is common to question your faith during this time. For some, looking for meaning is a way to cope.

Some ways to find meaning are:

- Read or listen to uplifting materials
- Pray or meditate
- Talk with a priest, pastor, rabbi, Imam or spiritual leader
- Go to religious or spiritual services
- Talk to other caregivers



5. Going with your loved one to medical visits

a. Before you go

Your loved one may ask you to join their doctor visits. This may be a key role for you. Here are some tips for going to the doctor:

- Know how to get there. Give yourself enough time
- Write down questions you need to ask or things you want to tell the doctor
- Keep a folder of your loved one's health information and take this folder with you to each visit
- Take a list of all the medicine they are taking and the doses to each visit

b. Talking with your doctor/radiotherapist/nurse

Sometimes, people have trouble with medical visits. They don't understand what the doctor says or they forget things.

Here are some tips for talking with the healthcare professional:

- If you don't understand an answer, ask the question in a different way
- If you need to know more, ask
- Let your doctor, radiotherapist or nurse know what your worries are
- Before you leave the visit, ensure you know the next steps in your loved one's care
- Take notes or ask if you can record the visit
- Let the doctor know if your loved one has had changes or new symptoms

c. Questions to ask the doctor or healthcare team

- How can we prepare for treatment?
- How long will the treatment take?
- Can they go to and from treatment alone?
- How can I help my loved one feel better during treatment?
- Can I be there during treatment?
- What are the side effects of the treatment?
- After treatment, what do we need to watch out for? When should we call you?

Every cancer story is unique

In the same way that no two fingerprints are the same, two people may have the same diagnosis but they will respond completely differently. Netcare recognizes that everyone will have their own fears, and their own coping mechanisms. The way we live, the way we feel, all these create a unique outcome, which is impossible to determine beforehand. It means we can each take charge over the process.

We are not beholden to statistical data. We are not linear. We are organic. We are individual. Just like our fingerprint.

Netcare's approach is designed with this in mind. Not the other way round. If you would like more information, please visit our website at <https://www.netcare.co.za/Cancer-care>





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