Article Series Caregivers

9 Ways to Find Peace, Meaning, and Purpose as a Caregiver

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Caring for a loved one with cancer can be deeply fulfilling. A growing body of research shows that many caregivers find their lives enriched with greater meaning, spiritual growth, and deeper family connections — even as they navigate the emotional and physical demands of caregiving.

But it’s easy to lose track of your peace of mind when caring for your loved one may sometimes feel overwhelming, stressful, and unpredictable. Almost half of cancer caregivers report feelings of anxiety and depression.

However, even in the most difficult moments, there are ways to find steadiness and calm. These include taking the time for small daily rituals, self-care, and reflection or prayer.

- Small daily rituals can be supportive; like listening to music you love which may help lift your spirits
- Self-care – which includes getting enough sleep, maintaining a healthy diet and using relaxation techniques — can help you feel able to continue your role as a caregiver
- If you have a spiritual practice, a short daily reflection or prayer can be calming, evoking a sense of peace

Spending quality time with your loved one may also be enriching and rewarding, giving you a sense of meaning and purpose.

“Set aside time to do something together in a relaxed way, even if it’s simply having a conversation or listening to music,” says Dr. Shanthi Gowrinathan, a psychiatrist and director of psycho-oncology at the John Wayne Cancer Institute at Providence Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica, California. “This is so you can have a meaningful and lovely interaction, without any ‘work’ involved. That’s when you stop being a caregiver and you go back to being a partner or family member.”

“Most caregivers say they have few regrets, and have grown in patience and compassion,” says Donna Benton, associate professor of gerontology and director of the USC Family Caregiver Support Center. “Many feel they grew closer to the person they were caring for, finding a sense of purpose and peace, while providing a quality of life to their relatives that could not be done by a stranger.”

Here are some **Microsteps** that may support you during your caregiving journey. Consider practicing them regularly and as needed.

Playing a piece of music that you love.

Listening to soothing or uplifting music of your choice may improve the mood and provide a mental break from caregiving responsibilities. Studies have found that music may improve quality of life and lower anxiety in caregivers.

Reading or writing an uplifting poem.

Poetry can be inspiring, and comforting, while helping you process your feelings and improve your mood. It may also support your emotional wellbeing, and help you make sense of your experience.

Taking a moment each day for prayer, meditation, or having a conversation with someone in your spiritual or religious community.

Research shows that if you have a spiritual practice, these connections and practices can support caregivers' emotional health and mood, helping you feel hopeful and fostering a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

Walking outside and immerse yourself in nature — even if it's just a few minutes in a nearby park or green space.
Even a few minutes in nature may improve wellbeing and promote feelings of contentment and purpose. If you can't go out, stand by a window. Notice the air, the sky, the trees, or the sound of birds.

Spending a few minutes a day on a mindfulness practice like meditation or a deep breathing exercise.

Mindfulness may help you reduce stress. Start by practicing mindfulness for just a few minutes at a time in a quiet place, and make it easier by pairing it with daily activities like meals or walks, or using a guided app.

Connecting with a friend, counselor, or support group to talk about your emotions and feelings.

Having a conversation with someone who knows you well, or someone who has been through similar caregiving challenges, can provide emotional support and remind you of the purposeful work you are doing.

Sharing quality time with your loved one that isn’t focused on their cancer or caregiving.

This could be looking through old photos together, sharing precious memories, listening to an uplifting podcast, or watching a favorite joyful movie together. Quality time together can increase empathy and foster meaning and purpose.

Writing down one or two things you did well today no matter how small. Keep a notebook by your bed and on nights when you have the energy, remind yourself that you are doing the best you can. Self-compassion and kindness may build resilience and help you find meaning in your role as a caregiver.

Reframing overwhelming worries and challenges as opportunities for growth and learning.

Pausing to breathe and shift your thoughts, while reflecting on what you are learning and possible solutions, may reduce negative feelings and help you see things from a more positive perspective, while fostering a sense of meaning and purpose.

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