Article Series Caregivers All

Caring for your loved one is important—but so are you

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If someone you love was diagnosed with cancer, stepping into the role of a caregiver may have felt natural to you. After all, you want the best for this person, so who better than you to provide love and support? Kimaya, who was diagnosed with HER2+ breast cancer, was able to focus on her treatment and recovery, thanks to the support of the people around her. "It was good to know that if I needed something, I could ask," she says.

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But, caring for someone with cancer can be a huge undertaking. You may feel as though your needs have been put on the back burner so you can focus on your loved one.

However, if you don’t take care of yourself, you may begin developing symptoms like tiredness and trouble sleeping, and you may begin to feel overwhelmed. In fact, you may already feel severe sadness and grief about your loved one’s condition—and these feelings and symptoms may get worse if you don’t address your own needs as well.

Try not to feel guilty about taking care of yourself or seeking help from your own loved ones or doctors. Caring for yourself isn't selfish, especially when you spend so much of your time as a caregiver for someone else. Remember, you're important, too!

Making time for yourself

There are a number of things that you should try to prioritize when you can. Doing so will help to maintain the balance between caring for your loved one and caring for yourself.

The first thing to keep in mind is physical activity. Adults should try to get 30 minutes of exercise every day. Sometimes, that will feel like an unrealistic goal, but even a little bit of exercise can help. If it's difficult to carve out 30 minutes, try breaking it up into three different 10-minute sessions spread throughout the day. Going on a walk with your loved one may be a good idea as well. People living with cancer should try to get some exercise, too, so walking together may be beneficial for both of you, if appropriate.

Another important thing to stay on top of is your diet. Although eating unhealthy food may sometimes seem faster and easier when you feel stressed and overwhelmed, fueling your body with healthy food may help give you the energy you need to be the best caregiver you can be.

If you can find a little time to plan your meals in advance, this may help you resist the urge to go for the easier, quicker option. For snacks, consider things like nuts, yogurt and fresh fruit. These are healthy choices that require little to no preparation.

In addition to exercising and eating well, don’t forget about getting enough rest. When you're caring for someone living with cancer, you may feel as though there simply aren't enough hours in the day. But getting the necessary amount of sleep may help you be the best caregiver you can be. Try to stick to a regular sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day. This may help you get a better night's sleep so you can wake up feeling rested.

It's also important that you take time for yourself to relax in ways that you really enjoy. It might be as simple as going to lunch with a friend or watching a funny movie. Taking small pockets of time for yourself can help you to recharge and feel ready to face the next day.

You might also want to try using **LivingWith™**, a free app designed to help people manage a loved one’s care and update friends and family on their behalf. You can also use the app to track your mood, pain, sleep and steps, which may help you take care of yourself, too.

Download **LivingWith** today

Don’t forget your own health

One thing is for certain: Being there for your loved one can make a huge impact. Billy, a jazz musician who has had cancer in his kidney, liver, lungs and brain, is so grateful for the loving support of his wife, daughter and friends over the years. "One of the things I found out is that I had chosen my friends well," he says.

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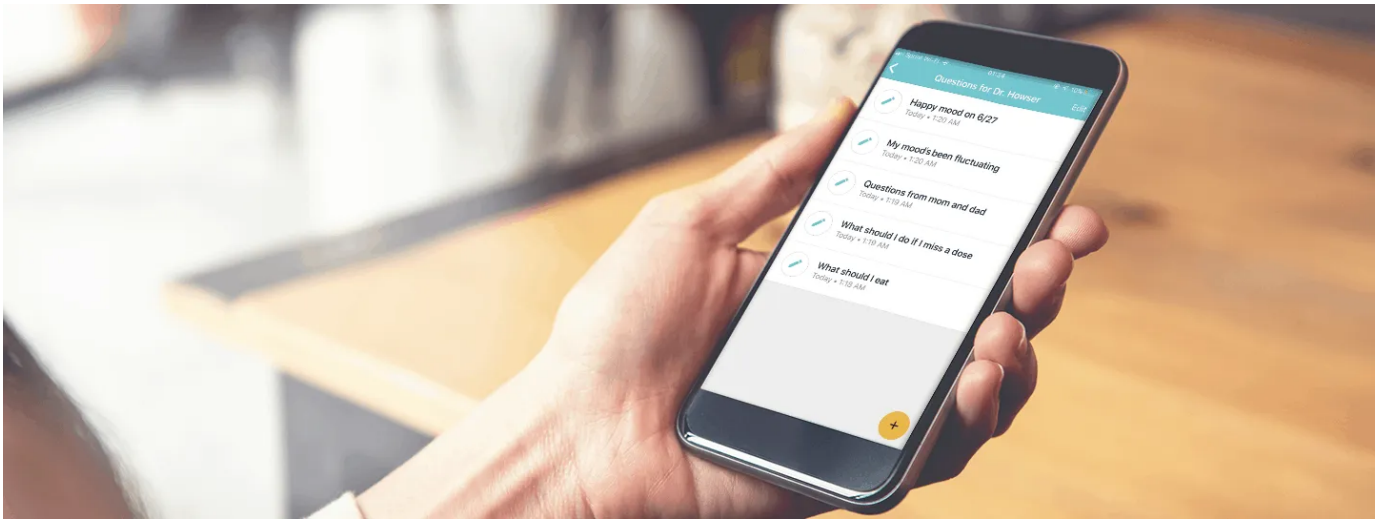
As you focus on being the best caregiver you can be, try not to neglect your own health needs. Schedule regular checkups, continue taking any medications you have been prescribed and keep monitoring your own health.

The better you take care of yourself, the better you’ll be able to take care of your loved one.



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