

- Will your supermarket deliver your phoned order?
- Pre-prepared meals from friends or the supermarket are useful if the ill person does not eat normal meals and you have to cook just for yourself.

Check early on whether the ill person's doctor will make home visits. Ask the doctor to start visiting the person at home before transporting them becomes too difficult.

If there are still too many things that need to be done, ask friends and family for help. Ask each to do a small amount. Perhaps someone can take your laundry to do at home, post letters, pay bills, change library books or videos, or do some gardening for you.

Try to achieve several goals at once. For example, if you haven't seen your friends for a while, resist the urge to entertain them and instead, ask them for a meal with a difference. The difference is that they bring the meal.

## Involving friends and relatives

Sometimes the people you tend to rely on are not able to help you in this particular circumstance, perhaps because of their own fears or experiences. Others, unexpectedly, will be there for you. Many people want to help – so let them. You don't need to repay favours now, or directly to them. You can repay kindness by helping someone, sometime, further down the track.

Just now you have important work to do, most importantly, looking after yourself.

## Palliative Care

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## *about*

# Looking after yourself

*Information and Advice for Carers*



Looking after someone during a serious illness can be rewarding. It can also be demanding and exhausting work. Carer stress is a main problem in home care arrangements. Looking after yourself is thus important, not only for your own sake, but also because it will allow you to provide care at home longer.

Demands on the carer tend to increase during a serious illness, it is vital for you to ensure that your needs, as well as those of the ill person, are met.

## Healthy lifestyle

Although it may be difficult, you need to pay attention to your health. Have adequate rest, eat regular, nutritious meals and avoid excess use of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and self-medication. Try not to neglect your own medical and dental care. It is good practice to ask your doctor for a check up early in the care episode. Make sure your immunisations (flu injections etc) are up to date. Consider finding a GP who is not the ill person's doctor, for yourself.

## Social support

Social support is most important in coping with stress. Build your own support team. Involve friends, relatives, and neighbours and palliative care volunteers in the care of the person and in responding to your needs. If you are isolated from friends and family, the support of a palliative care volunteer may be especially welcome.

Relatives and friends who are a phone call away belong to your support network. Keep in touch with a regular, eg weekly, phone call. This will help your well being, and will allow them to respond helpfully

if you ring them when, as may happen, you feel overtaken by events.

Try to share your worries and feelings before being overwhelmed by them. Guilt and anger are common and troublesome emotions that need to be shared. You may feel unable to leave the ill person to attend to your own needs, or you may believe that you're the only one who can provide proper care. Discuss these feelings with a member of the palliative care team. If you find yourself shouting at the ill person, or handling them roughly, seek help without delay.

## Exercise and relaxation

Some physical exercise and some time both important if you are to remain fit and well. Think about your needs, make a plan, and try to stick to your plan. An ideal plan might include several periods of physical recreation each week, some daily social contact, which could be by phone, a planned half-day each week for personal recreation, and an evening once a month.

## Getting enough sleep

Lack of sleep tends to become a problem for carers as the illness progresses. Do not drive or make important decisions if you are overtired. If the ill person naps during the day, use this time to relax or nap yourself. If you share the same bed and are finding it difficult to fall asleep, try sleeping separately or getting into bed after the ill person is asleep. If you have major difficulties going to sleep, or if you regularly wake in the early hours, ask your doctor for help.

## Planning for respite

Leaving the person in someone else's care is a major emotional hurdle for many carers.

The carer worries about the ill person, who may be uncomfortable with intimate care from someone else. It is sometimes difficult to explain your need for time out to the ill person. If this is the case for you, ask a member of the palliative care team to help. If you take regular time out from the start, the person will get used to other carers. If you wait until you're exhausted you may need a longer break.

## Sharing the care

The main cause of problems with rest is feeling that there is not enough time to do everything. Trust others to help. Family members often develop deeper relationships when they are involved in giving care. A greater appreciation of life and death can be the result. Allow your friends, neighbours and relatives to judge whether or not they can help, and how often. When people ask, 'Can I do anything to help?' Think about your needs and their talents. Then make a clear, direct request for their assistance.

## Saving work

Make a list of the things you do, in order of importance. Then cross out the things at the bottom.

- Do you need to vacuum so often?
- Is all that ironing really necessary?
- Can you pay someone to do the routine tasks?
- Are you eligible for subsidised home help? Check with your local council.