

Being a Caregiver

There's help for you

You are a caregiver if you help someone with their daily routine. This might include helping them in or out of bed, dressing them, bathing them, hugging them and making them smile or laugh, giving them medicine, helping them bathe and go to the bathroom, cooking for them, feeding them, and running errands like cleaning, shopping, paying bills, and getting to health appointments.

Caregiving is tough! Very few people are ever fully prepared for this job. Here are three tips to help you along the way:

TIP#1 – YOU ARE IMPORTANT!

- get adequate food, sleep, and exercise
- keep your own medical appointments, and take only the medications needed to keep your health
- stay in touch with family and friends, and protect time to do things you enjoy

TIP#2 – GET HELP!

- get as much information as possible about your loved one's diagnosis and things you can do to make caring for them easier; ask your health team member for help finding this information
- don't be afraid to ask family, friends, and neighbours to help you – you're not a failure by doing so
- ask your health team member about community services that can help, like Community Care Access Centres, other in-home services, church/volunteer services, and respite stay facilities

TIP#3 – RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU'RE BURNING OUT!

- you may be feeling sad and crying more often, you may feel like you have less energy than usual, you may feel that you do not have time to yourself or to visit friends, you may have difficulty sleeping or wish to stay in bed all morning, you may have lost your appetite or be eating too much, you may feel like taking alcohol or medication to "take the edge off," you may get angry easily at the person you are looking after or at other people
- it's very common for caregivers to feel worn out – if you feel this way, make sure you talk to your health team member who can help find ways to support you in this difficult job

Some very helpful reading:

The Caregiver's Handbook, from the American Association of Retired Persons, find link in:
http://rgp.toronto.on.ca/caregiver_resources