

# INTRODUCTION TO CAREGIVING

## Am I a Caregiver?

If you are consistently caring for a loved one with a serious illness, you are a caregiver. If you're helping your loved one with their daily needs, such as making food, balancing the checkbook, bathing or dressing, or going to the doctor's office or the grocery store, you are a caregiver. You may be a son or a daughter, a husband or a wife, parent, an in-law, a neighbor or a close friend. You may live together, next door, across the state or across the country. Your loved one may only need support occasionally, or your loved one may not be able to manage alone.

If you're providing regular assistance, you are a caregiver.

You may not think of yourself as a caregiver. You may just see it as taking care of someone you love or lending a helping hand, but what you are doing is extremely important. Helping a loved one with cancer isn't always easy. Caregiving can be a full-time, nonstop job that wears on you physically and emotionally, but there are many things you can do to make caring for your loved one less stressful.

This caregiver workbook is filled with information, tips and activities to help you through the challenges of helping the cancer patient in your life.



Use worksheets titled **Emergency Room Plan** and **Weather Emergency Plan** to prepare for an emergency situation.

## What Does Caregiving Look Like?

Caregivers provide important ongoing care for the patient. The jobs of a caregiver fall into three basic categories: medical, emotional and practical. There are different levels of caregiving depending on your loved one's age, diagnosis, treatment plan and overall health. Your loved one may only need help from time to time to allow them to focus on healing after treatment. Or, your loved one may need constant care. The kind of support needed will be different for each person and may also change over time.

Caregiving often starts gradually with tasks such as driving to medical appointments, shopping for groceries and housecleaning. As treatment progresses, this can lead to round-the-clock care, which can feel overwhelming. Your tasks may grow to include feeding, bathing, supervising medications, arranging medical care and managing financial and legal affairs. There may be a time where you have to deal with an emergency situation, such as a trip to the emergency room or having to contend with severe weather conditions. However, caregiving is not always linear. When treatment is completed, your loved one may become well enough to start taking on daily tasks again.

## To Prepare For An Emergency Situation

*Here are just a few examples of caregiver tasks. Depending on what your loved one needs, you can help by:*

- Going grocery shopping and preparing meals
- Assisting with personal hygiene and changing clothes
- Assisting with using the bathroom
- Cleaning
- Doing laundry
- Keeping track of finances
- Driving your loved one to appointments and treatments
- Providing emotional support
- Reminding them to take medication and adhere to the treatment plan
- Communicating with members of the healthcare team
- Taking notes during medical appointments
- Communicating with other friends and family

## Caregiving Strategies

*Use the following suggestions so you don't feel overwhelmed and can be at your best to help your loved one:*

- ▶ Acknowledge that an adult loved one has the right to make decisions about their life. Respect that right unless your loved one is no longer capable of making decisions or could put others in danger through their behavior.
- ▶ Whenever possible, offer choices. The ability to make choices is a basic freedom, so provide choices whenever possible. Choices enable us to express ourselves. As your loved one's options become more limited due to health changes, financial constraints or social losses, you may have to work harder to provide choices.
- ▶ Do only those things your loved one can't do. If your loved one is still capable of performing certain activities, such as paying bills or cooking meals, encourage them to do so. Helping your loved one maintain a feeling of independence will make them feel better about being in a care-receiving situation.
- ▶ Be prepared to do what you promise to do. Many care recipients find it emotionally difficult to depend on others, and many worry about being a burden. With all these mixed feelings, your loved one needs to be able to rely on you. Do what you promise. Remember that your loved one needs you, even if they don't say so.
- ▶ Take care of yourself. Caregivers often exhaust themselves by trying to handle caregiving responsibilities on top of normal daily routines. Providing care for a loved one while holding down a job, and perhaps taking care of a family, can lead to exhaustion. If you become exhausted, you're more likely to make bad decisions or to take your frustrations out on your loved one. Take time out to do things you enjoy. Caregivers who take time for themselves can be there for the long haul. Ask your loved one's doctor to suggest local resources, such as adult day care, visiting nurse or home companion services that can give you some relief from responsibilities that may feel overwhelming.
- ▶ Give yourself a break. At some point in your role as a caregiver, you may start to feel resentment toward your caregiving responsibilities or even your loved one, especially if you are a long-term caregiver. These thoughts may be followed by feelings of guilt. Caregiving is a difficult job so don't beat yourself up over these normal and common feelings.
- ▶ Remember that your family is your first resource. There can be deep emotional currents when a loved one becomes ill. Some family members will want to do everything, while others will do very little unless they're asked. Yet, spouses, brothers and sisters, children and other relatives can do a lot to ease your caregiving burden.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to reach out to them for help.

“You just need to get friends together and say, ‘Listen, can you help drive my husband here? How many times?’ Don't be afraid to say, ‘I need help.’ A lot of people just take it upon themselves. `It eats you up and you can get sick yourself from it and be a mess.”

**— Donna, caregiver and wife of Pete, acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) survivor**

*Excerpt from November 2017 “Processing Our New Plan: Pete and Donna’s Story” podcast episode on The Bloodline with LLS health changes, financial constraints or social losses, you may have to work harder to provide choices.*



### Search for More Helpful Organizations

Many organizations help with cancer-related issues such as financial assistance, support and counseling, assistance with transportation, etc. Don't be afraid to reach out to these organizations for support.

For more information about specific resources, please reach out to SOUL RYEDERS' Client and Caregiver Navigators or refer to the resource section of this workbook.