Caregivers

The role of caregiver may be new, or familiar to you. Caregivers can feel unprepared, anxious, and even overwhelmed. However, caregiving can also offer rewards: a time to tell stories, express love or appreciation, an opportunity to give back, or time to say goodbye.

Tips for dealing with caregiver stress:

- Communicate. Talk about your concerns with a trusted friend, clergy, hospice team or professional counselor who specializes in life events.
- Continue hobbies, clubs, or special projects that you enjoy. Consider having a friend or volunteer help with caregiving during these times.
- Say YES to people who offer help. If you do not want them in your home, ask them to do errands for you.
- Handle one thing at a time. Do this by dividing tasks into smaller parts.
- Set priorities and do the most important things first, then the rest as you are able.
- Try to eat healthful foods. "Grazing" is a good approach since small amounts of food throughout the day will give you energy.
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water.
- Physical activity is a stress reliever, even if it is only a short walk.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep whenever you can. Lie down for 20 minutes or sit with your feet up. You may want to ask for a volunteer so that you can take a break and nap.
- Decide if calls or visits are helpful or not. You can limit visits as a way of honoring your own needs, or the needs of the person you are caring for. Give yourself time alone when you need it.

How to ask for help:

Some people are comfortable asking for help with caregiving, while others find it more difficult. Caregiving can be exhausting over time. It is good to ask for support sooner rather than later (before becoming physically, emotionally, or spiritually drained).

Often, family members, friends, neighbors, and others want to help, but may not know exactly what they can do for you.

Make a list of tasks that others could do. Keep it near the phone in case someone calls and offers help.

- Find out what he or she has time to help with.
- Discuss the specific tasks that need done. Ask if there is something from the list that they are willing to do.
- Try to be as specific as you can so that the person knows exactly what would be helpful.

What can I do to cope?

Depression, grief, and guilt are natural and common feelings among caregivers, especially in the final stages of the person's illness. Feelings of helplessness and failure can occur. You may feel many types of losses, such as loss of friendship, companionship, and familiar routines. This can be difficult to handle.

Remember, you are not alone. There are many ways to cope with the stresses you may feel as the person's illness naturally progresses.

- Be open and honest with your feelings and share them with someone (such as a family member, friend, spiritual counselor, or member of your hospice team).
- Review the goals and expectations that you set for yourself and make sure that they are realistic. Remember that sometimes goals change as the dying person's circumstances change.
- Try to accept the things that you cannot control and ask for help.

What to do if you are feeling overwhelmed:

- Ask yourself, what activities MUST be done? Be specific.
- Decide which activities you can handle on your own and which activities other people can help with.
- Consider who else you can ask to help so that you can stay focused on the things most important to you and the person you are caring for.
- Let your hospice team know how you are feeling.