



Take Care of Yourself Too

A Care Partner Resource

What have you done to take care of yourself today?

Your ability to help is impacted by how you feel. This resource will help you understand why taking care of yourself is an important piece of the puzzle, how to recognize signs of stress, and what to do about it.

A CARE PARTNER IS

- A companion, a helper, and a sounding board
- Someone who helps with physical or emotional support
- An essential member of the care team
- **You**

THE ROLE OF A CARE PARTNER

Being a care partner for a woman with ovarian cancer can mean many different things. What she needs from you may depend on where she is in her treatment and how she is feeling physically and emotionally.

Additionally, her needs may change over time. One day she may need someone to go to the doctor with her. She may need someone to pick up a few groceries. Or she may simply need someone to talk to.



RECOGNIZING CARE PARTNER FATIGUE

The partnership of care can be very rewarding.

It feels nice to be able help someone you care about. But that doesn't mean it is always easy. Care partners can experience stress related to their role. Care partner fatigue, the long-term effect of that stress can be easy to overlook.

Signs of care partner fatigue include

- Changes in sleep such as sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling worried or overwhelmed constantly
- Changes in eating habits
- Losing interest in activities that used to bring joy
- Feeling sad or depressed regularly
- Frequent headaches
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs, including prescription medication
- Delaying personal health needs

If you believe you may have depression, seek professional help.

Sound familiar? You are not alone. Care partner fatigue is common. Moreover, in a survey done by The National Alliance for Caregiving, over half of those surveyed reported moderate to high stress.

Your risks increase if you already have depression, live with the woman whom you care for, are socially isolated, have financial difficulties, and the longer you provide care. The good news is that there are many ways to address and prevent care partner fatigue.

OTHER WORDS YOU MAY HEAR TO DESCRIBE CARE PARTNER FATIGUE INCLUDE CAREGIVER STRESS AND BURNOUT.

Now that you know the symptoms to look out for, read on to begin to create your plan to take care of yourself.

PREVENTING CARE PARTNER FATIGUE

What can you do to prevent care partner fatigue in the first place? Start by remembering that you have needs too. It is not selfish to also take care of yourself. You will be a more effective care partner if you are healthy both physically and emotionally.

Taking time for yourself is important. How you feel can affect your role as care partner. Setting aside time for yourself can help you feel more resilient. Having more resilience means you have additional resources to cope. That way, when life doesn't go exactly as planned, you may be able to adapt more easily.



Make sure you take care of your own health.

When was the last time you visited a dentist? How about had a physical? Do you have any health issues you have put on the back burner? Make sure you are getting enough rest, eating healthy foods, and getting regular physical activity. Now is a great time to start making a plan to take care of yourself.



Plan regular activities that are just for you.

Perhaps it is getting coffee with a friend, getting exercise at the gym or taking a hike outside. Listen to music that makes you feel happy or calm. Join a club or peer group that interests you.



Add mindfulness to your routine.

Mindfulness is not a spiritual practice, but one designed to train the mind. Many conditions can be positively impacted through the practice of mindfulness. Activities like mindful breathing or walking may help issues like depression, anxiety, and issues with sleep. It is not a substitute for conventional care, but could be added to your plans for taking care of yourself.



Go outside.

Spending time in nature can help you think more clearly. Stop. Breathe. Listen. Take a little bit of time to sit and enjoy. Think about ways you could integrate more time outside into your day.

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE CARE PARTNER FATIGUE

First, take a deep breath. Remember that care partner fatigue is common. You are certainly not alone in feeling this way. Start by giving yourself permission to experience the full range of emotions. Feeling sad or frustrated is normal. You have the power to choose how you respond. You can choose healthy, productive ways to address how you feel.

This short list may give you some ideas. Which ones could you consider trying? What else could you add to that list?



Take a break.

Give yourself an hour or two of rest. Stay in bed and read. Take a few minutes to stop and stretch. Or plan for ways to treat yourself. Everyone needs a break sometimes. Schedule regular breaks so you have something to look forward to.



Talk to someone.

Consider joining a support group or check out an organization specifically for care partners. Being surrounded by people with a similar experience can help you process how you feel, provide an outlet for your emotions, and also give you new ideas for addressing issues commonly experienced by care partners. Support groups not for you? Find a trusted friend with whom you feel comfortable sharing how you feel. Vent. Process. Hug.



Seek help. Accept help when it is offered.

It can feel hard to ask for help or accept it when offered. Consider ways to reach out to your support network to ask for help on things that will be simple for them to do, but will give you time and energy to spend elsewhere. Make a list of things such as walking the dog after a day at the doctor's office or changing a lightbulb on the porch. When someone offers to help, ask for help from that list of activities. The person you ask will probably be thrilled to be able to help.



Plan activities.

Think about activities that bring you joy. Reading. Watching baseball. Going to the movies with a friend. You may have put off these activities lately. Make a plan to do something fun for yourself.



Make a plan.

Having a specific plan to take care of yourself may make you more likely to actually do it.



Physical activity.

Regular exercise has many benefits, including improving your mood. Whether you go for a walk, play tennis, work in the garden, or do another physical activity you enjoy, consider adding exercise to your routine.

MAKE A PLAN

3. Finally, think about your personal health.

Make sure you have appointments for yourself to visit the doctor, dentist, and any specialists you see.

My next visit to the doctor is:

My next visit to the dentist is:

My next haircut is:

I can work toward a healthier me by:

Other appointments I have are:



FOR MORE SUPPORT FOR CARE PARTNERS, VISIT:

- Our Way Forward | OURWAYFORWARD-OC.COM
- National Alliance for Caregiving | CAREGIVING.ORG
- National Ovarian Cancer Coalition | OVARIAN.ORG
- MyLifeLine.org Cancer Foundation | MYLIFELINE.ORG
- Sharsheret | SHARSHERET.ORG

