



Personal • Dedicated • Healthcare

6th in a continuing series supporting chronic disease management



## Helping someone with cancer

The chances are someone you know—a neighbour, friend, co-worker or family member—is facing a cancer diagnosis. The waiting period can be very difficult, but there are a number of ways that you can be supportive:

- Listen
- Help with daily chores
- Frequently offer to help in other ways
- Spend time with them

## A cancer overview

**The bad news:** In 2009, it is estimated that over 170,000 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in Canada.

**The good news:** The mortality rate in women for all cancers (other than lung cancer) has dropped 20 per cent since 1980. And for the first time ever, statistics report that 2009 promises fewer cases of lung cancer than in previous years.

## Living with cancer

Discovering that you or a loved one has cancer can bring about many changes. Whether you are actively seeking treatment, newly diagnosed or caring for someone else with cancer, it is certain that you will face a number of tough decisions and practical and emotional issues. So, when life gets overwhelming and challenges present themselves, it is important to know that everyone deals with cancer in their own way and there are different ways to cope.

No one can predict exactly how cancer will affect your day to day life. But while you cannot control the future, you can think about possible changes and how you might like to handle them if they come up.



### Managing stress

Everyone has their own way of relieving stress. As you learn to cope with cancer, you may have to experiment to find the best ways to make yourself feel better and capture a sense of control.

Sometimes, the stress of living with cancer can be overwhelming. It may help to try to get rid of some of

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## You can trust We Care

We Care is the largest independently owned home care service provider in Canada, with over 50 locations from coast-to-coast. Our services include

- Nursing
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# Coping as a caregiver

As a caregiver working with someone with cancer, you will be faced with new and important responsibilities. Whether as a professional or as a loved one, caring for someone with a chronic illness can be incredibly difficult and consuming work. Alongside the physical requirements of cancer care, there are added responsibilities.

These might include:

- Running a home
- Caring for children
- Dealing with finances
- Acting as a source of information for the patient's family and friends
- Maintaining a career

That being said, balancing these tasks with cancer care can be as rewarding as it is challenging, and making a positive difference can be comforting during this stressful time. Professional caregivers may find that they develop a bond with care recipients, and with the patient's friends and family.

As wonderful as this relationship can be, it can also create a heightened sense of difficulty for the caregiver. Supporting a cancer patient can sometimes feel like an emotional rollercoaster, with the extreme highs and lows that surface when someone you care about is ill. You might feel frustrated that you can't just snap your fingers and make things better.

You might also find yourself dealing with a variety of distressing emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, anxiety or guilt. Worse, you might feel that you are not allowed to have these emotions because you need to be "strong" for the patient. This can make it very difficult to look after yourself and meet your own emotional needs.

## A healthy caregiver

Looking after yourself is not selfish, it's responsible. Caring for

someone with cancer involves a great deal of coping. It is important, therefore, to first care for yourself. Keeping up your strength and spirit will help you to do the same for the person dealing with cancer. Here are a few ways to look after yourself:

- Learn more about cancer and its emotional and physical effects.
- Talk about what's happening and share feelings of frustration with trusted friends and family in order to vent stress. Councillors and support groups are also an option.
- Try not to feel as though you have to do everything. Even at the best of times no one can be the perfect partner, caregiver, friend, parent, wage earner and so on. Trying to wear all of these hats will likely only result in you overburdening yourself. Learn to ask for help and say "yes" when anyone offers assistance, even if it is just to do the dishes or cook a meal.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Feeling frustrated or overwhelmed is a natural response to a stressful situation.
- Quick, healthy and easy to prepare meals are best.
- Take a break. Go for a walk, get a massage, see a movie or meet up with a friend—do not disregard the everyday activities that you enjoy. If you are concerned about leaving the person with cancer alone, ask someone to stay with them and leave a contact number where you can be reached. Taking time to unwind can help you return to your caregiver role refreshed.
- Pamper yourself with little personal treats to keep yourself going, such as taking a hot bath or watching your favourite show.
- Protect yourself and visit your doctor if you have any



health concerns. Make sure you get plenty of rest, maintain a healthy diet and take regular exercise.

- Lastly, let your healthcare team know if you want information about respite care. This involves a trained professional visiting the home while you take some personal time. It is an excellent way to take a break, do some errands or have a little fun

## Laugh out loud

Although cancer is not a funny subject, some people do find that humour helps them to deal with the disease. Using laughter to relieve tension does not mean you are taking the disease lightly.

It is okay to laugh at the funny side of life. When you laugh, your brain releases chemicals that relax your muscles and make you feel good. You may be surprised at the positive effects of:

- Watching a funny movie or television show
- Enjoying the amusing things children or pets do
- Laughing at a witty remark from a friend

## Creative activities

Many people find that creative activities help them safely release their feelings. You do not have to be formally trained and you do not need expensive equipment. And it certainly does not matter if you have never done these things before. Try something—and if you feel better, try it again. Experiment with:

- Drawing or painting
- Writing poetry or stories

- Singing or making music
- Dancing

### Distraction

Many people use distraction without realizing it. They watch television or listen to the radio to take their minds off their worries or discomfort. Any

activity that holds your attention can be useful to distract you. Working with your hands, doing needlework or puzzles or building models are good examples. Losing yourself in a good book is another way to keep from thinking about pain and other worries.

### Living with cancer *continued from cover*

the tension or emotions. There are a number of ways to vent, including:

- Letting yourself have a good cry
- Putting on some loud music
- Writing down your fears and worries

Venting your emotions in any of these ways will not hurt anyone, and it might make you feel much better.

### Taking time away from work

If you or a loved one has cancer, it is very possible that your way of working will change. If you work outside the home, you may require time off or an adjustment to your work schedule. If your work is running your household and taking care of your children, you may also need to change the way you do these jobs by seeking some additional help.

For some people, taking time away from work may feel like a relief. But it can also be stressful, particularly if you have to live on less money. Likewise, many people enjoy their jobs and it can be difficult to give them up, but it is important—either as a patient or caregiver—to take time off work as needed for medical appointments or recovery.

### Changes to finances

Cancer can affect your finances. You may need unpaid time away from work, which can affect your income. In addition, treatment-related expenses can really add up. Such expenses might include:

- Travelling to and from treatments or appointments
- Drugs

- Child care
- Home care
- Nutritional or food supplements

A good first step is to understand more about health insurance. Most medical expenses are covered by health plans, but coverage may vary from province to province and many non-medical costs might not be covered.

If you have private disability insurance or insurance through your employer, familiarize yourself with the terms and conditions of your coverage. Find out what your insurance will pay for and what you will need to pay for yourself. You may have to pay a percentage of the cost of services or there may be a yearly or lifetime limit. Also, be sure to keep good records, including copies of all bills and correspondence.

### Palliative care

The unfortunate reality of any illness is that sometimes patients do not get better. Palliative care is a special kind of health-care for those living with the advanced stages of a life-threatening disease such as cancer. Palliative care can be very difficult to talk about, but there are specialists who can help make these discussions a bit easier.

The focus of this kind of care is providing comfort, dignity and the best possible quality of life for patients and their families.

While palliative care is usually for those who have surpassed the possibilities of treatment, its nature is also to reduce pain and suffering and it therefore may also be helpful in the early stages of cancer.



### Will we ever find a cure?

“Yes!” say those who have survived cancer and those whose lives it has touched. Today, 62 per cent of people diagnosed with cancer will survive the disease, compared with 33 per cent in the 1960s. In the past 20 years, research has dramatically improved both treatment and the quality of life during treatment.

Basic cancer research acts as the cornerstone of cancer study. Using sophisticated tools and technologies, scientists are observing and describing complicated biochemical and genetic processes to answer our most fundamental questions about cancer:

- How does the disease start?
- How do tumours grow and spread to other parts of the body?
- Can this growth be stopped?

Research has already yielded many answers to such questions, and our understanding of cancer has never been greater. In fact, much of the success achieved over the last 50 years has been thanks to basic research.

### Attention caregivers

Ask for your complimentary copy of Solutions®

magazine, courtesy of your local We Care Home Health Services location.

Visit [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca) or call 1-800-605-0916.





## A brighter future

The Canadian Cancer Society believes that 50 per cent of cancers can be prevented. This year, the society awarded the first set of research grants for a special preventative initiative and hopes to invest approximately \$3 million. These projects will advance cancer prevention research by identifying things that we can change to reduce our cancer risk, such as our behaviours and exposure to cancer-causing agents at work, at home or in our environments.

## For more information

**Canadian Cancer Society**  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

**Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada**  
[www.canceradvocacy.ca](http://www.canceradvocacy.ca)

**Cancer Care Ontario**  
[www.cancercare.on.ca](http://www.cancercare.on.ca)

**Breast Cancer Society of Canada**  
[www.bcsc.ca](http://www.bcsc.ca)

**Lung Cancer Canada**  
[www.lungcancerCanada.ca](http://www.lungcancerCanada.ca)

**Prostate Cancer Canada**  
[www.prostatecancer.ca](http://www.prostatecancer.ca)

# Ask our experts

*Forward your questions or comments, and we'll ask our experienced nursing team to provide you with the latest advice and information.*

## Does We Care provide specific services for cancer patients?

We Care has core services that allow individuals to be as comfortable as possible while recuperating from cancer treatment or surgery. As well, We Care has dedicated programs such as our Palliative Care Program, in which personal support workers and registered staff are specifically trained to provide care to those clients who require palliative care services. The Palliative Care Program is not just for cancer patients, but does address many of the concerns that cancer patients face, such as nutrition, pain control and assistance with activities of daily living.

## Can a We Care staff escort me to a cancer care treatment appointment?

Most We Care locations across Canada have staff that can assist a client to get to and from medical appointments, including cancer care treatment. This usually includes staying with the client during the appointment as well. It is always best to set these medical escorts up ahead of time, to ensure consistency with the staff as well as ensuring that the appointments are reached on time.

## How do I arrange for palliative care?

Palliative care can be arranged by contacting any We Care office across the network. You will begin by talking

with the care coordinator who will assist you in arranging a complimentary, in-home assessment by the care manager, who is also a registered nurse. The care manager will work with you and your family to develop a plan of care that best meets your needs for assistance, whether it be 24 hours a day, seven days a week, or just a few hours once a week. The care manager will also work with you to determine whether your need is for a registered staff or a support worker. The support worker can assist with most activities of daily living, such as bathing, meal prep, and light housekeeping. The registered staff can assist with more complicated tasks such as pain control. The care manager will also be able to assist with accessing any government funded home care that you may be able to receive.



Send your questions to Julia Sommers at [julia\\_sommers@wecare.ca](mailto:julia_sommers@wecare.ca)



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