

# Domestic chores



“It was really hard to ask for help with the ordinary things I used to take care of myself – but when I finally did, it took away some of the stress I was feeling – and my friends were so happy to help!”

**Francine**  
**Diagnosed with breast cancer**

## **How does this affect me?**

You may not be able to manage everything in your daily life yourself as you once did before the diagnosis and treatment. This is completely normal since treatments, appointments and self-care can occupy a lot of your time.

Remember that asking for help is not a sign of defeat! It can help you gain a sense of control and feel more confident about getting on with your treatment.

Here is a list of some—but not all—of the difficulties you might be facing at home, that you can seek help with:

### **If you live alone, it isn't easy to have to deal with practical tasks while living with cancer:**

- You may fall behind on household tasks like shopping and laundry.
- If you have children, pets or plants, you may need help looking after them.

### **If you live with your partner/family:**

- You may have to delegate some of the things you've always done—like drive the kids to lessons, cook all the meals or look after the yard.
- Roles of others may need to change. Your kids or parents may take on new tasks or responsibilities in your place.
- If you are taking care of your elderly parents, someone else may need to help them for now.



## What help do I need?



### **Put it in writing**

Keep a journal where you can list the things you need help with, as they come up. This list will make it easier to ask for assistance or to accept help when it's offered. For example the list may include:

- meal preparation
- shopping
- housekeeping
- gardening
- child care
- plants and pet care

[Click here to visit the e-IMPAQc website for an example of Symptom diary.](#)



### **Seek help sooner, rather than later**

Because some things can take a little bit of time to organize, you are better off organizing help as soon as you identify the need.



## Where can I find help?



### Family and friends

Don't be afraid to ask for help. People around you may be eager to help but they don't know where to start. They will be very happy to hear from you and be able to do what is really needed. Here are some tips for talking to your family and friends:

- Ask your family and friends to think about how, how often and how long they could provide help. Write it all down to refer to when needed.
- If your family lives with you, have regular family meetings to talk about the week ahead. Together you can create a schedule that includes your upcoming medical appointments and treatments as well as other family members' activities that week. Make lists of tasks that need to be done and agree on who does what.
- Give feedback when family members try to help. Let them know that their help is appreciated. Be honest about what you need and don't need. They can't read your mind!
- For more information see [Changing Roles and Responsibilities](#).

## ↔ **Other support services**

When in doubt, ask – don't assume certain types of help aren't available to you. If you feel you need a service, there is no harm in asking.

- Ask your doctor to refer you to a social worker. A social worker might help you to find appropriate services according to your needs.
- Consult your local CLSC for any services or referral information they may be able to offer.
- The [Quebec Cancer Foundation](#) provides a resource directory. You can search for the organizations near you offering a variety of services including home help, lodging, transportation, and other supportive resources.
- If preparing meals is a challenge for you, then contact a Meals on Wheels service in your area. For more information see the [Répertoire des programmes et services](#).
- Your school, work, or spiritual community might be happy to help cover practical needs such as cleaning and shopping. Ask a trusted friend in the community to try organize this, if you are uncomfortable to do it yourself.
- If available, use online shopping and grocery delivery services.

## **What can I do to look after myself?**

By getting the help you need at home, the more you will be able to focus on getting healthy. For more information see [Looking After Yourself](#).

### **Eat well**

Eating well helps you feel better, cope with side effects, and recover after treatment.

- You might need more energy or calories during treatment to not lose weight.
- Drink plenty of liquids so you don't get dehydrated, even more so on days when you are unable to eat.
- Protein can help your body heal and maintain a healthy immune system. Protein is found in fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, dried beans, lean red meat.
- Check with your healthcare team to find out if there any foods or beverages that you should not eat or drink because of your cancer or treatment.



## Move your body

- It is generally fine to exercise during treatment, but check with your healthcare team before starting any exercise.
- Physical activity can improve your sleep and appetite and lessen treatment side-effects like nausea and fatigue.
- Choose an activity or exercise that you enjoy doing or would like to try, and that you can fit into your schedule without too much difficulty.



## Practice relaxation strategies

Relaxation strategies are a useful way to help relax your mind and body. The good thing about these techniques is that they can be done almost anywhere. For more information see [Relaxation Strategies](#).

- **Breathing exercises.** This focuses on slow, deep breathing. Even a few minutes of deep breathing can help you relax.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** This involves tensing and relaxing a muscle, or group of muscles, one at a time.
- **Guided imagery or visualization.** Some people find that this technique relaxes them by helping them imagine being in a place that makes them feel calm in real life. Guided means someone talks you through the process in person or using a recording.
- **Meditation.** Meditation is a practice of quieting the mind, usually by focusing attention on the breath. You can meditate sitting, lying down and even walking.
- **Massage therapy.** Use a certified massage therapist who has experience working with cancer patients.
- **Relaxation activities.** Yoga (some types) and tai chi involve slow, meditative movements that help relax the mind and body. Look for classes with trained instructors so that you learn the proper techniques.

## **Resources**

For more information on carrying out domestic chores and support organizations, check out the resources below.

[Canadian Cancer Society – Family life and cancer](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society – If you are single and have cancer](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society – Being active](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society – Eating well during and after treatment](#)

[Gouvernement de Québec – Using the Meals on Wheels Service](#)

## **Acknowledgement of sources**

The content of this document has been adapted from the following sources:

- TEMPO. Needing more help at home. 2016.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Eating well during and after treatment. 2020.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Being active. 2020.
- Canadian Cancer Society. If you are single and have cancer. 2020.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Family life and cancer. 2020.

## **Healthcare professional endorsement**

The content of this document has been reviewed and approved by a team of healthcare professionals and clinical experts.

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