

# Independence



“I felt that I was going stir crazy. I just wanted to be able to do the things that I’d done before I got this. My family were so supportive and took care of everything but all I wanted was to be able to look after my home and my family. I was lost without that.”

**Michael**  
Diagnosed with colorectal cancer

## How does this affect me?

Cancer and its treatment may come with of challenges to your daily life. No matter where you are in life, accepting help and relying on others will allow you to save the energy you need for treatment and a better recovery. You could live alone, have a young family, or be in your golden years. Regardless, it is normal for you to find it more difficult than before to manage the demands of daily life. Especially in addition to the personal care that your health condition requires. This is not a sign of weakness. The challenge is to accept the help that may be offered from family or friends and to seek the help you may feel you need.



## What can I do to increase my independence?

You may feel frustrated when you find it hard to do the things that you did easily before the cancer diagnosis. Here are some strategies that may help you feel in control:



### Accept offered help

This can be hard for some people who are used to being independent. However, try and remember how good it makes you feel when you can help others. For more information see [Getting Support](#).

- Make a list of people who have offered to help and when they could be available. At the same time, don't feel you have to accept help from everyone. If you don't feel comfortable accepting help from someone, for whatever reason, it's okay to say 'Thanks but no thanks'.
- If it's possible for you, try to get help from various people. This can help minimize the risk of overworking your caregiver.



### Modify your home environment

You may have side effects of dizziness or decreased balance. To avoid injury in your home, clear away clutter on the floor so you won't trip on anything. Try brightening your lighting to make the area safer while getting around.



**What help do I need?**



### Keep a symptom diary

Keep a list of the help that you might need. Then it will be easier to ask for assistance from a person who offers help. The list may include:

- Personal care eg., bathing and grooming.
- Home care eg., cleaning, shopping, home maintenance.
- Family responsibilities eg., organizing childrens' activities, updating family on your health.
- Transportation eg., getting to and from appointments and treatments.
- Support person at appointments/treatments.
- Meal preparation.
- Plants and pet care.



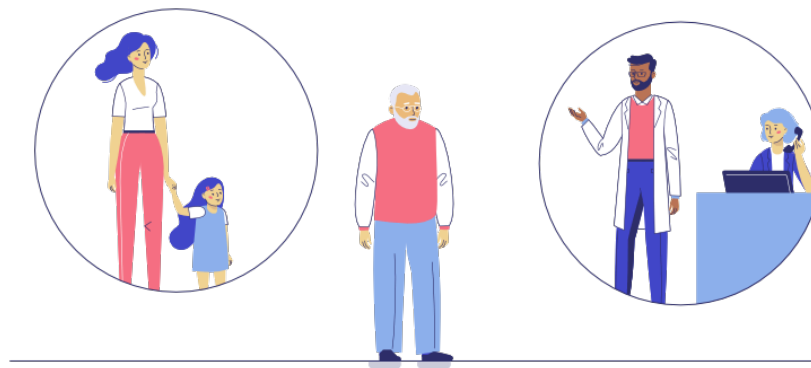
### Communicate

Whether you have a spouse or partner, young or grown children, live alone or with others, a cancer diagnosis can change the roles and responsibilities for all of you. We suggest discussing these changes with those close to you. This communication can help avoid overburdening anyone with too many responsibilities. If you want assistance with this communication from a counsellor or social worker see the section [Where can I find help?](#) For more information see [Changing Roles and Responsibilities](#).



### Act early

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



## Where can I find help?

### Friends and family

Don't be afraid to ask for help. People around you may be eager to help but they don't know where to start and what would help you the most. 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. Try using social media to coordinate these tasks with your friends and family.
- 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.
- 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!

Consider asking one or two people to be put in charge of organizing the points mentioned in this section.

## Your healthcare team

- Speak to your doctor, nurse or pivot nurse if you are experiencing side-effects from treatment that are hindering your daily activities. They may be able to recommend management strategies. For more information, see [Talking to your healthcare professional about your symptoms or concerns](#).
- You can ask your doctor to refer you to a psychologist or social worker. A social worker might help you find appropriate services according to your needs.
- Consult your local CLSC to discover what services are offered that could help you.

## ••• Other kinds of support

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.

- 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. They could assist with cleaning and shopping, for example. 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.
- Call the Canadian Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333 to find about available services.
- [The Quebec Cancer Foundation](#) provides a resource directory. You can search for the organizations near you offering a variety of services. These include home help, lodging, transportation, and other supportive resources.
- A local volunteer centre.



## What can I do to look after myself?

By getting the help you need for your daily life, you will be able to focus more on getting healthy. Maintaining your strength during treatment will increase your ability to maintain independence. Try the following strategies:

### Plan what you eat

- You might need more energy or calories during treatment to not lose weight.
- Drink plenty of liquids so you don't get dehydrated. If you don't feel able to eat a whole meal, try a food supplement, like *Boost* or *Ensure*.
- Protein can help your body heal and maintain a healthy immune system. Protein is found in fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, dried beans, and lean red meat, for example.
- Check with your healthcare team to find out if there are any foods or beverages that you should not eat or drink because of your cancer or treatment.
- For more information, see [Looking After Yourself](#).



## Stay active

- It is generally fine to exercise during treatment. Check with your healthcare team before starting any exercise to be sure.
- Physical activity can improve your sleep and appetite. It can also lessen treatment side-effects like nausea and fatigue.
- Choose an activity or exercise that you enjoy doing or would like to try. Make sure that you can fit it into your schedule without too much difficulty.
- For more information see [Looking After Yourself](#).



## 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 du Québec – Using the Meals on Wheels Service](#)

[Cancer.net – How to stay safe and independent during cancer treatment](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society – Talking to children about cancer](#)

## Acknowledgement of sources

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

- Breastcancer.org. How to accept and ask for help when living with metastatic breast cancer. 2020.
- 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.
- Coping together. Getting on top of symptoms. 2013.
- ASCO. How to stay safe and independent during cancer treatment. 2019.
- TEMPO. Needing more help at home. 2016.
- TEMPO. Stressed by the changes in our roles and responsibilities. 2016.

## Healthcare professional endorsement

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



## **Disclaimer**

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