

Look after others



“Being a caregiver can be really hard when you’re sick and struggling yourself – it isn’t easy to rearrange plans to be with someone when they are depending on you.”

Louise
Diagnosed with lung cancer

How does this affect me?

You may have people in your life who depend on you and who will also be affected by your cancer diagnosis. You may need help with looking after your children, helping with homework or taking them to activities. You may be responsible for aging parents and need someone to help with this for a little while. Managing cancer treatment and doctor’s appointments may not allow you to take on the tasks and responsibilities you once did and there will need to be a change in roles. This can be challenging but with open communication and a support plan you can get through this time.



What can I do to help look after those who depend on me?

Talking to your loved ones and others close to you can help you face the challenge of dealing with cancer while you put in place the support needed for those who depend on you. Good communication can help you gain the support you need and understand others’ concerns. The following tips may help:



Talking with young ones who depend on you

There are some special considerations when talking with children and teenagers. They can often sense when something is wrong. It is important to talk to them and give them opportunities to express their feelings. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- It's a good idea to wait until you have received your final diagnosis and treatment plan before speaking with your children. Give yourself some time to process your emotions first.
- When you are ready, use words appropriate for your children's ages. Briefly tell them what the illness you have is called, what part of your body is affected, and what will be done to treat it.
- Lead into things gently, don't overload them with information. Keep it simple—kids don't need all the details of your treatment. Be open and honest.
- Encourage them to share their concerns and feelings—their questions can be your guide to what information they want to know.
- Remind them how much you love them.
- Reassure them it is not their fault. Young kids sometimes think they are to blame for a parent's illness.
- Do not force the conversation if they do not want to talk. They will approach you when they feel ready.
- Tell them it is okay to ask questions and to share their feelings. Ask them if they would like to talk to a counselor.
- Invite your teenager to attend a medical appointment with you if they wish to.
- Tell them it is okay to share their feelings with their friends if they want.

Changing Roles and Responsibilities

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 of living for all of you. These changes need to be discussed and negotiated with your support group regularly, as your needs change. This communication can help avoid overburdening anyone with too many responsibilities. You may want assistance with this communication from a counsellor or social worker (see the section in this factsheet [Where can I find help?](#)). For more information see [Changing Roles and Responsibilities](#).

Creating a personal support system

Even if it is outside your comfort zone, reaching out to friends and family members in times of stress can lighten your burden. There are many ways of connecting, and different approaches may work at different times. Some thoughts to keep in mind:

- Some people are better at providing practical help, while others know just how to listen. When building your support network, consider the strengths and skills of each person.
- Be specific about the help you need. It might be looking after your children while you rest, or driving your elderly parent to an appointment.
- If you can't manage your worry about those who depend on you on your own, more formal support or treatment could help you feel better. Talk to your oncologist, nurse or pivot nurse to discuss your options.



What help do I need?



Make a list

Make a list of the kind of help you and your loved ones need. If you are having trouble with this, try a problem solving, step by step approach. In this way you can break down bigger problems to a more manageable size. For further information see [Problem solving](#). Start by making a list of areas where you need help—this may include some of the following:

Support services for

- Housework and home maintenance
- Emotional support
- Legal or financial issues

Family and friends can help with

- Child care or homework help
- Pet care
- Gardening
- Transportation
- Groceries and meal preparation



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?

Healthcare team

There may be a psycho-social professional on your healthcare team. If not, you can ask your doctor for a referral. Psychosocial-oncologists can help you understand, navigate and adjust to the social, psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects of cancer care. They can also provide or help you find support services you and your family may need, as well as support groups for patients or caregivers.

Friends & Family

The people around you may be eager to help but not sure what you need. Don't be afraid to ask! 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 with your friends and family the tasks that you need help with.
- 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!

••• **Other sources for services and support**

- Canadian Cancer Society: Call the Canadian Cancer Society (1-888-939-3333) and ask for the “Community Services Locator” service. The CCS provides cancer information, an online community at [CancerConnection.ca](https://www.cancerconnection.ca), and access to support services in your area.
- [Fondation Québécoise du Cancer](#): Call the Info-cancer hotline (1-800-363-0063). This hotline is for both patients and their loved ones to have a confidential conversation with a nurse who can direct you where to go to meet your needs.
- The Foundation also 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
- Consult your local CLSC for any support services they offer or a referral to a local service you may need!
- Phone book/social media. Even if you don’t find exactly what you’re looking for, reach out to a service provider and they might be able to point you in the right direction.
- Your school, work or spiritual community could cover practical needs.
- If available, use online shopping and grocery delivery.

Resources

For more information on support organizations, check out the resources below.

[Canadian Cancer Society – How we can help](#)

[Quebec Cancer Foundation – Info-Cancer Hotline](#)

[Quebec Cancer Foundation – Resource directory](#)

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

[WICWC – A little “app “about cancer](#)

[Joan Hamilton – When a Parent is Sick 2nd Edition](#)

Acknowledgement of sources

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

- Fondation Québécoise du cancer. Trouver de l'aide pour alléger le quotidien. 2020.
- Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology. A Guide to counselling and support for families and friends.2009.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Coping when you have cancer. 2020.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Family life and cancer. 2020.
- Coping together. Getting on top of symptoms. 2013.
- Cancer Care Ontario. Oncology Caregiver Support Framework. 2019.
- TEMPO. Stressed by the changes in our roles and responsibilities. 2016.
- TEMPO. Knowing Where to go for more support. 2016.
- TEMPO. Helping each other feel better. 2016.

Healthcare professional endorsement

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

Disclaimer

Please note that this fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare professional. If you have questions about your health, or any medical issue, you should contact a healthcare professional right away. You should not delay seeking medical advice, or disregard professional medical advice, because of information in this fact sheet. Before beginning any health treatment, always consult your doctor. All care has been taken to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate at the time of publication. e-IMPAQc is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of, or related to, any use of the fact sheet, or because of any errors or omissions.

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