

Personal care



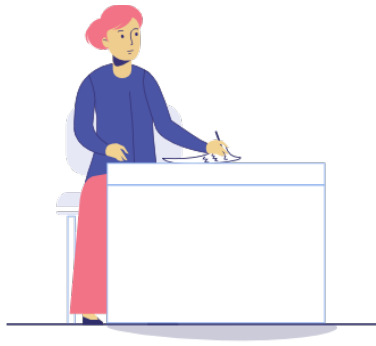
“I realized that taking care of myself also meant accepting help from others. I had a personal care aid visit me every other day to help me with things like bathing and doing light tasks. This made me feel safer and it reassured my family that we had the support we needed at home.”

Marie
Diagnosed with ovarian cancer

How does this affect me?

There are several ways that side effects from cancer treatment and/or symptoms from the disease may affect you. You may notice changes in your independence and your personal care routines. Perhaps you may need to change from showering to bathing. Likewise, you may find it hard to dress in the clothes you once wore. Living with cancer does not necessarily mean you need to move in with family or into the hospital. However, you may need extra support at home. For example, you may feel more tired on the days you have chemotherapy or radiation therapy. These treatments could make things like dressing, moving, and washing up more difficult. It is important to get help with what you have difficulty doing on your own. This is true regardless of whether you are surrounded by family, live by yourself, or have a main caregiver. When you get the right help, you may find that you:

- Feel more confident, pleased and comfortable knowing you are well cared for at home.
- Feel supported, especially if you can expect regular visits from care workers.
- Worry less about remembering when to take your medication.
- Reduce the risk of caregiver burnout for those caring for you.



What can I do to make personal care more manageable?

Your local CLSC can offer information on home-based services. You can set up home visits that will suit your routine and schedule. There are many organizations that can connect you with trained caregivers. They can visit you and help you with tasks like bathing and dressing.



Keep a symptom diary

Make a list of the tasks that you will need help with. This list will come in handy when you ask your CLSC or family doctor about homecare services. They will help you to communicate exactly what type of help you need. Think about how often you need help. For example, a few times a week or every day. Your needs and those of your family may vary. This is especially true if you have family members who already help you with some of these tasks. This list is an example of the things you may want help with:

- Bathing/showering
- Toileting/transferring to and from the bathroom
- Dressing
- Shaving/grooming
- Taking medications at the right time



Review if you need to add equipment to your home

Look at your living space. Take note of any changes that could make it easier and safer to get around. These can equipment such as:

- A ramp to replace stairs.
- A railing to the bath.
- A chair in the shower.
- A handrail on your bedframe to make getting in and out of bed easier.

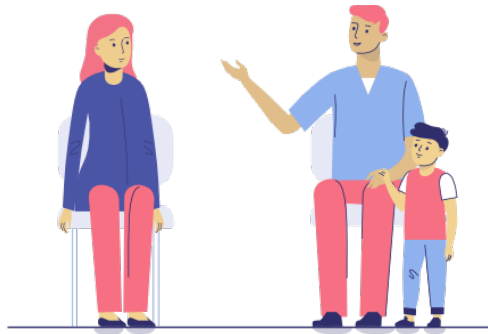
Write these ideas down and bring this list with you when you visit your healthcare provider.



Watch out for family caregiver burnout

Your main caregiver who helps with your care may experience burnout if they are the only support in place. This could be your partner or spouse. Your family caregiver may benefit from added help at home. This way they can have time to rest, relax, and continue to look after themselves. Look out for these signs of caregiver burnout:

- Lack of interest in doing things they used to enjoy
- Feeling tired even after a good night's rest
- Neglecting their own personal care
- Trouble concentrating or remembering tasks
- Changes in appetite or sleep



Where should I start?



Brainstorm and communicate

- Look at the list of tasks you need help with. Plan a time to talk to the person closest to you to get their feedback. This could be a spouse or partner, child, close friend, or sibling.
- Once you share this, think about who you will ask for help. (E.g. “I will ask my healthcare team for more information at my next appointment” or “I will call my nearest CLSC to ask for information about possible changes to my home.”)
- Family roles and responsibilities may change over time. Therefore it is important to communicate your needs with your loved ones. For further information see [Changing Roles and Responsibilities](#).



Financial concerns

- Review your work insurance or other private insurance. You may find the cost of homecare services could be partially or fully covered.
- Look into public programs available through your CLSC that provide homecare services. Check out [Index Santé](#) for more information on what services your local community clinics provide. These services may be offered temporarily during your cancer journey. However, they could be available long term depending on your situation.
- Visit The Canadian Cancer Society’s [list of financial supports](#) available nationwide and by region. There you can find more information on what supports are available to you.

Act early

Reach out to your healthcare team early on. They can help you set up homecare services through your CLSC or a private service. It may take time to find a caregiver and set up these services. The sooner you reach out to ask about this, the less stressful it will be for you and your family in the long run. Contact homecare services as soon as you think you will need help at home.



Where can I find help?

Your healthcare team

You can ask your healthcare provider for a referral to homecare services or for a consult with a social worker. They can help you reach out to community services that offer personal care to people who need them. Homecare support services may be provided on short or long-term basis, depending on your needs. As your health changes, you and your healthcare team may reassess the need for and the frequency of these services. You can also ask your doctor for a referral to an occupational or physical therapist. These professionals can help you better perform your daily activities. For example, they can do home assessments. They can also help you plan what changes or equipment you need to remain safe at home.



Your local CLSC (community service centre)

Reach out to your closest CLSC or health clinic. You can also call Info-Santé at 8-1-1 to speak to a nurse. They can refer you to services provided at your nearest health centre. A healthcare professional will assess your situation. Then they'll connect you with the right resources and professionals. Homecare services are offered to individuals who need extra support for whatever reason. Some reasons might include a cancer diagnosis, a major surgery, a chronic illness, or a disability. You can find medical, nursing, psychosocial, nutritional, social, domestic, and rehabilitative services through your CLSC.



Community Services Locator

Canadian Cancer Society. In addition to asking for help from your healthcare team, you can go [online](#) to look for homecare services in your area. The Canadian Cancer Care Society has a community services locator that can help you locate private homecare services, if you are interested.

Quebec Cancer Foundation. The Foundation provides a [resource directory](#) where you can search for the organizations near you. There are a variety of services. These include home help, lodging, transportation, and other supportive resources.



Your pharmacist

It is very important to take your medications on time and in the right way. Your pharmacist can help you stick to your treatment plan correctly. You can get help by asking for:

- Written instructions. This might include the colour of your pills, what they are for, when to take them and if you should have a full or empty stomach.
- Information on side effects and interactions with other foods or medications.
- Instructions on what to do if you miss a dose.
- Activities to avoid while taking your cancer medication.
- A pill box or blister pack to make it easier for you to remember what medications to take.

You can set a timer on your phone or keep a medication diary to keep track of your medications. You can write down all the medications you are taking and the times that you take them. This can help you and your healthcare team in the management of your medication.



What can I do to look after myself?

You can do self-care activities to look after yourself. This will make you feel more alert and help you manage your symptoms.



Plan what you eat

Good nutrition will help your body feel better and stay strong during treatment.

- You might need more energy or calories during treatment to maintain your body weight.
- Drink plenty of liquids to prevent dehydration. Do so especially when you are unable to eat.
- Protein can help your body heal and maintain a healthy immune system. It 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 avoid during treatment.
- For more information see [Looking after yourself](#).



Practice relaxation strategies

Relaxation strategies help to calm the mind and body. These techniques are simple and can be done almost anywhere.

- **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. It helps to let go of body tension.
- **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. This can be in person or using a recording.
- **Massage therapy.** Use a certified massage therapist who has experience working with cancer patients.
- For more information see [Relaxation strategies](#).

Resources

For more information on personal care and available resources, check out the resources below.

[Canadian Cancer Society – Community Services Locator](#)

[Quebec Government – Info Santé 811](#)

[Quebec Government – Finding a CLSC](#)

[Quebec Cancer Foundation – Resource Directory](#)

[Info-aidant](#) is open every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. to listening, and provide information and references. info-aidant@lappui.org 1 855 852-7784

Acknowledgement of sources

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

- Coping Together. Getting on top of symptoms.
- TEMPO. Needing more help at home. 2018.
- CancerCare. The role of pharmacists during cancer treatment. 2020.
- CancerCare. The importance of taking your pills every day on schedule. 2020.
- CancerCare. Advice for caregivers: Handling Burnout. 2020.
- BC Cancer. Home Support Services. 2020.
- Gouvernement du Québec. CIUSS: Home Care. 2020.

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

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