



# CAREGIVER RESOURCE: HOW LOVED ONES CAN HELP WITHOUT BURNING OUT

*Disclaimer: This guide is for general informational purposes only and is not medical, legal, or psychological advice. Always consult your healthcare team or a licensed professional for guidance specific to your situation.*

Supporting someone through a lung cancer diagnosis and treatment is an act of deep love, but it can also be emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausting. Caregivers often balance their own responsibilities while trying to meet the needs of the person they love. This guide is designed to help caregivers provide meaningful support while protecting their own well-being. Caring for yourself is not selfish, it is essential.

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*Clear Information. Compassionate Support.*

# UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE AS A CAREGIVER

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Caregiving looks different for everyone. Some loved ones help with transportation or meals; others manage appointments, medication schedules, or emotional support.

## It's important to remember:

- You do not need to do everything yourself.
- Your role may change over time.
- Small acts of support are meaningful.
- Being present often matters more than doing everything perfectly.

Caregiving is a partnership—not a solo mission.

# ASK WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT IS TRULY HELPFUL

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Instead of guessing what your loved one needs, ask directly. Needs may vary from week to week or even day to day.

## Useful questions include:

- “What would make today easier for you?”
- “Do you want company or quiet time right now?”
- “Would you like help with meals, appointments, or organizing information?”
- “Is there anything you feel worried about that I could help with?”

Asking helps avoid overwhelm—for both of you.

# SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

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It's normal to want to "fix" everything, but no caregiver can meet every need. Recognizing your limits early prevents burnout.

## Be honest with yourself about:

- Your available time
- Your emotional capacity
- Work and family responsibilities
- What tasks you can and cannot take on

Setting reasonable expectations protects your well-being and allows you to provide consistent, sustainable support.

# SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES

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Caregiving works best when shared among multiple people. Creating a small caregiving team relieves pressure and ensures the patient receives consistent support.

## Ways to share tasks:

- Dividing responsibilities (meals, appointments, house tasks)
- Using a shared calendar
- Rotating visits or calls
- Allowing others to help with childcare or household needs
- Asking friends or neighbors to provide specific support

People often want to help—they just need guidance.

# PROTECT YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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Supporting someone with cancer is emotionally challenging. Caregivers often suppress their own feelings to stay strong, but this can lead to fatigue or resentment over time.

## Healthy emotional practices include:

- Talking to a counselor or support group
- Allowing yourself to feel sadness, frustration, or fear
- Journaling or practicing mindfulness
- Setting time aside for hobbies or enjoyable activities
- Taking regular breaks from caregiving

Your feelings matter. Caring for yourself helps you support your loved one with more presence and compassion.

# MAINTAIN HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

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Boundaries are not barriers—they are tools that help protect your energy and allow you to support without becoming overwhelmed.

## Examples of healthy boundaries:

- **Time Boundaries:**
  - “I can help after 6 PM, but I’m unavailable during my workday.”
  - “I’m able to stay for an hour, but I’ll need to leave after that.”
- **Emotional Boundaries:**
  - “I’m here to listen, but I can’t take late-night crisis calls. Let’s talk in the morning.”
  - “I care about you deeply, but I need to pause this conversation if it becomes too overwhelming for me.”
- **Availability Boundaries:**
  - “I can attend medical appointments with you twice a month, not every week.”
  - “I can coordinate one area—like transportation—but I can’t manage everything.”

## ○ **Digital/Communication Boundaries:**

- “I’ll respond to texts by the end of the day, but I may not reply immediately.”
- “If something urgent comes up, please call instead of messaging me repeatedly.”

## ○ **Household/Practical Boundaries:**

- “I can help with meal prep on Sundays, but the rest of the week is too busy for me.”
- “I can organize the paperwork, but I can’t be the ongoing point of contact for every provider.”

Clear boundaries prevent burnout and build trust.

## **MONITOR FOR SIGNS OF BURNOUT**

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Caregiver burnout can creep in slowly. Recognizing early signs helps you course-correct before you feel overwhelmed.

### **Watch for:**

- Chronic fatigue
- Irritability or impatience
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling guilty when resting
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling emotionally numb or overwhelmed

If these appear, it’s time to ask for help, reduce responsibilities, or take a short break.

# TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

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It's easy to neglect your own body when you're focused on someone else, but your physical health is essential to your caregiving role.

## Helpful habits include:

### ○ Fuel Your Body Consistently

- Eat balanced meals throughout the day (even if they're small or simple).
- Keep nutrient-dense snacks on hand for busy moments.

### ○ Stay Hydrated

- Carry a water bottle with you.
- Set reminders if you tend to forget to drink.

### ○ Move Your Body Gently and Regularly

- Short walks, stretching, yoga, or light workouts—whatever feels doable.
- Aim for movement that resets your nervous system, not perfection.

### ○ Protect Your Sleep

- Keep a nighttime routine that signals your body to wind down.
- Take brief afternoon rests if sleep is disrupted.

### ○ Don't Neglect Your Own Care

- Keep your own medical or therapy appointments.
- Refill your prescriptions and manage your own health conditions proactively.

### ○ Build in Mini-Breaks

- Step outside for fresh air.
- Take 5-10 minutes to breathe, regroup, or stretch between responsibilities.

Caregiving is physically demanding—and your body needs support, too.

# COMMUNICATE WITH THE MEDICAL TEAM

Caregivers often help interpret medical information or remind loved ones of details. Staying informed helps you provide the right support.

## Helpful questions to ask the care team include:

### ○ Understanding the Condition & Treatment

- “What exactly is the diagnosis and what does it mean?”
- “What is the goal of this treatment—cure, control, or comfort?”
- “How long will treatment last?”

### ○ Monitoring Symptoms

- “Which symptoms or changes should we watch for?”
- “What’s considered *normal* *versus a warning sign*?”
- When should we call the doctor, go to urgent care, or go to the ER?”

### ○ Managing Side Effects

- “What side effects can we expect?”
- “What can we do at home to manage them safely?”
- “Are there medications or strategies to make them easier?”

### ○ Daily Care Guidance

- “Are there activity, diet, or lifestyle recommendations we should follow?”
- “Are there any restrictions (driving, lifting, working, etc.)?”

### ○ Support & Resources

- “Are there programs we qualify for—financial, emotional, transportation, or home health?”
- “Who can we contact after hours if we have concerns?”

## To stay organized, you may want to:

- Take notes during appointments
- Keep a shared medical notebook or digital folder
- Track medications, symptoms, and questions as they arise

Being informed doesn’t mean you need to know everything—it simply empowers you to help your loved one feel safer, supported, and understood.

# KNOW WHEN TO ASK FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP

Professional support exists for caregivers—and using it is a sign of strength, not weakness.

## You may need additional support if you're experiencing:

- Constant fatigue or emotional exhaustion
- Ongoing worry or fear that you can't shake
- Feelings of depression, irritability, or hopelessness
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling overwhelmed by daily responsibilities
- Difficulty managing work, family, and caregiving needs
- Physical symptoms like headaches, insomnia, or appetite changes

## Helpful professional resources include:

### ○ ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKERS:

Provide emotional support, guidance, and access to financial and practical resources related to cancer care.

### ○ LICENSED COUNSELORS OR THERAPISTS:

Help you process stress, anxiety, grief, and the emotional strain of caregiving.

### ○ CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS:

Offer connection with others facing similar challenges, along with shared strategies and encouragement.

### ○ PALLIATIVE CARE TEAMS:

Focus on improving quality of life by managing symptoms, coordinating care, and supporting both patients and caregivers.

### ○ FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE COUNSELORS:

Help you navigate medical bills, insurance issues, copay programs, and available financial relief options.

### ○ PATIENT NAVIGATORS:

Assist with scheduling, paperwork, understanding treatment plans, and communicating with the medical team.

### ○ HOME HEALTH AIDES OR RESPITE CARE SERVICES:

Provide hands-on help with daily activities or step in temporarily so caregivers can rest and recharge.

These professionals can lighten your load and give you space to care for yourself.

# TAKE BREAKS WITHOUT GUILT

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Rest is not optional—it's essential. Taking time away helps maintain your emotional balance, mental clarity, and compassion.

## Break ideas:

- Short walks
- Coffee with a friend
- Time with a hobby
- Quiet time to read or meditate
- A weekend where someone else covers caregiving duties

Taking breaks strengthens your ability to show up fully.

# STAY CONNECTED TO YOUR OWN LIFE

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Your identity is more than your caregiving role. Staying connected to the parts of your life that bring joy and meaning helps you stay grounded.

## Try to maintain:

- Friendships
- Family routines
- Work-life balance
- Personal goals
- Spiritual or faith practices

Your life matters, too.

# SUPPORT FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD

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Being a caregiver is a powerful act of love—but you cannot pour from an empty cup. Supporting someone with cancer requires compassion, strength, and resilience, but also rest, boundaries, and help from others.

## **Remember:**

You do not have to do everything.

You do not have to face it alone.

And you deserve support just as much as the person you care for.

With balance, boundaries, and the right resources, you can support your loved one while staying emotionally and physically healthy.