

Helping cancer caregivers help themselves

March 22 2017



(HealthDay)—When people are diagnosed with cancer, it's easy to overlook the toll the disease also takes on their caregivers, say social workers who specialize in cancer care.

Cancer can dramatically alter relationships, forcing parents to depend on their children, or independent people to rely on loved ones. Meanwhile, those who support cancer patients—such as spouses, partners, siblings, children or friends—tend to put their own needs on the back burner.

Caregivers who keep their mind and body healthy, however, are able to provide better care for their loved ones, advise Lauren Kriegel and Autumn Banta, oncology [social workers](#) at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

Finding the time and energy to take care of yourself may seem difficult while caring for someone with cancer, Kriegel and Banta pointed out in a Rutgers news release.

However, there are ways caregivers can also take care of themselves without having to spend a lot of time or money. The social workers make the following suggestions:

- **Don't feel guilty.** It's normal to feel badly about doing something for yourself if your loved one is coping with [cancer](#). It's important to identify and share these feelings in a safe place, but don't let them prevent you from addressing your own needs. You can't help someone else if your levels of energy and patience are low.
- **Make a happy list.** Write down some of the things that help you feel joy, such as playing a good song, going for a walk or taking a bubble bath. Be sure to carve out a bit of time to do these things.
- **Relax.** Find ways to stay relaxed and calm. It's important to maintain [healthy sleep habits](#). Staying relaxed may also require some breathing exercises, guided imagery or meditation. There are apps you can download to help guide you through this process.
- **Don't be hard on yourself.** It's important to show compassion

towards others but it's equally important to give yourself a break. Caregivers often feel stress. Be sure to recognize this and take small steps to help you ease this strain.

- **Ask for help.** Reach out to an oncology social [worker](#). This is a professional who can devise a personalized plan to help you cope with your role as a [caregiver](#).

More information: SOURCE: Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, news release, March 2, 2017

The American Cancer Society provides more support for [caregivers](#).

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Citation: Helping cancer caregivers help themselves (2017, March 22) retrieved 19 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-03-cancer-caregivers.html>

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