



Caring for someone with cancer

by Josie Padro



Caring for someone with cancer can mean providing emotional support, physical care or help with household chores—sometimes very little, other times quite a lot. In that way it's not very different from caring for someone with any other illness or disability.

[Those caring for someone with cancer will likely experience a whole new learning curve.](#) Each type of cancer comes with its own disease process, prognosis and treatment options. Patients and their families find themselves sorting through information about chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery. In addition to treatment there are often side effects to consider, as well as learning how to deal with them.

As with any new medical diagnosis, it's important to understand what it is and how it will be treated. It can be intimidating to ask for information or to clarification, but knowing what to expect will help reduce fear of the unknown. Caregivers can help by taking notes during medical appointments and asking questions along the way.

While it's natural to search the internet for information, it's also important to check that the source of information is up to date and trustworthy. Also, you may be overwhelmed by all the described worse-case scenarios. It's important not to panic, but to discuss the information with your health care provider so that they can put it into perspective.

Those dealing with cancer sometimes experience health challenges related to their treatment. [A few of those issues are listed here:](#)

Sore mouth – some treatments may cause the tissues in the mouth to breakdown, causing pain and difficulty eating. Check the mouth regularly and encourage frequent rinsing. Avoid store-bought mouth washes that contain alcohol and could further irritate the mouth. Sipping warm tea may help, as can eating cold foods such as freezies or ice cream.

Fatigue – whether it's due to the cancer itself or to the treatment, those with cancer often experience fatigue. This may mean putting activities into priority and choosing the most important and most meaningful.

Lowered resistance to infection – Cancer treatment can take a toll on the immune system, with risk of infection becoming a serious concern. Ask your physician what kind of precautions you need to take. Hand washing is always extremely important. It may be necessary to avoid crowds and those with active colds or viruses. Raw foods such as sushi and vegetable sprouts are often not recommended.

Poor nutrition—dealing with cancer, cancer treatment, and even recovery can require a lot of energy. Add fatigue and a sore mouth and it's no surprise those dealing with cancer need extra nutrition. It's a good time to mix up some high calorie smoothies and serve frequent small meals rather than three large ones. As with any nutritional issue, be sure to consult a registered dietician, either at the hospital, at your local health unit or by phoning HealthLink BC, www.healthlinkbc.ca, at 8-1-1.

Resources:

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/emotional-support>

<https://www.inspirehealth.ca/>

<https://cancerchat.desouzainstitute.com/>