



NEW ENGLAND Cancer Specialists

CANCER CAREGIVER TIPS

Caring for a loved one who has cancer may be the hardest job you'll ever do. With the help of some good advice from those who know, we've compiled a few tips to help lessen your burden as a caregiver.

PROVIDER VISITS (PHYSICIAN, NURSE PRACTITIONER OR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT):

- Remember to bring along a notebook and pen or pencil. You'll want to write down the provider's instructions and any questions you may have.
- When you think of a question between appointments—write it down!
- Never be embarrassed to ask them to explain something you haven't understood.
- Keep a separate calendar just for medical appointments.

PRESCRIPTIONS:

- Mark different medications to clearly identify them. For example, on the cap, write "S" for steroids, "P" for pain, "N" for nausea" and "Z" for sleep." Multiple medications within a category can be marked S1, S2, S3, etc.
- Keep a dry erase board on your fridge and make a chart showing the designated drug cap numbers and when they are to be taken.
- For emergency room visits, maintain and bring along a paper list of the name of the drug, amount, date started, date ended and what cap was assigned. (You can use the stickers that come from the pharmacy, indicating drug name and dosage). Add notes to the sheet if your patient has any adverse reaction to a particular drug.
- Dispose of any unneeded drugs.





THE INTERNET:

- Be prudent when searching the Internet: there is a great deal of information, but not all of it is reliable. Always consider the source of what you read, and keep in mind that our specialists are continually checking the latest scientific research.
- Highly regarded sources of information include:
 - American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org
 - American Society of Clinical Oncology: www.cancer.net
 - Mayo Clinic: www.mayoclinic.org

DIFFICULT PATIENT:

- Your loved one will sometimes be tired, in pain or may not feel like eating when they should. That's OK, just be patient. Everybody is allowed to have bad days.
- Make sure your loved one eats regularly! Getting enough calories is the goal, so let them choose anything, within reason.
- Sometimes you have to mediate between your loved one and their provider. For instance, a patient may not want to take their medications, contrary to instructions. Do the best you can.

HOME HEALTHCARE:

- Don't try to do it all alone. There's no shame in asking for help from a qualified service that provides skilled care or a chance for you to get a break.
- Take time to get out of the house. Having time to shop, do errands, or just get away for a break is important to maintaining a sense of normality.
- Ask your nurse or an expert at NECS for suggestions on home healthcare.

TAKING CARE OF YOU:

- Being a caregiver for someone with cancer can be an overwhelming job. Give yourself permission to take a break now and then.
- If you need to, talk to the nurses at NECS and listen to their advice.
- You can't do it alone. If you need help, and no one is offering just ask. Friends may hesitate to offer help because they're uncomfortable or don't want to "interfere."
- Stay connected with the outside world—family, friends, colleagues.
- Make sure that you stay healthy.