

# Giving Care

care and education  
for cancer patients and those who love them



MAPLE TREE CANCER ALLIANCE

## Caregivers

A caregiver is a very important part of the health care team. Since hospital stays tend to be shorter than they used to be and people with cancer are living longer than before, caregivers are becoming an integral part of cancer recovery. Caregivers can be anyone who helps the patient with their activities of daily living at home, and may include spouses, children, relatives, or friends. Tasks of a caregiver may be anything that involves improving the patient's health and quality of life, including administering medication, transporting the patient to doctors visits, cooking meals, providing emotional support, and helping with the decision-making process.

Although caregiving can be rewarding, it can also result in feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety. Many caregivers feel they are "on call" all hours of the day. As a result, they often feel overwhelmed. The strain is not only psychological, as the stress related to caregiving is associated with higher levels of blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol and heart disease. In addition, caregivers often have a weaker immune system and memory disturbances.

### Some ways you can help relieve caregiver stress include:

- Offering to sit with their loved one so they can have time "off"
- Help the patient by running errands for them
- Connect them with other members of the church who are also in the role of caregiving so they can support one another
- Encourage them to remain organized – follow a daily routine
- Encourage them to make healthy choices – find time for exercise, eat healthy, and get enough sleep
- Be there to listen. Caregivers often feel guilty when expressing the stress they are under, so simply listen to them and assure them that they are not walking this road alone and what they feel is normal!
- Deliver a meal to them
- Help them with chores around the house

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Some signs and symptoms of caregiver stress are:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing weight
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Becoming easily angered
- Feeling overwhelmed, alone, or isolated
- Losing interest in activities they once enjoyed

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