

Caring for Someone with Heart Failure

Taking Care of Yourself

If you give care to someone with heart failure, you could find yourself facing new responsibilities. It can be both rewarding and challenging to be a 'caregiver'.



A 'caregiver' is anyone who gives help and care to another person in need.

Signs of caregiver stress

When you are focused on caring for someone else, you might not realize your own health is suffering. At times, you might feel overwhelmed, physically or emotionally. This is called 'caregiver stress'.

Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- feeling tired all the time
- having trouble sleeping
- gaining or losing a lot of weight
- feeling guilty, like you are not doing enough
- feeling overwhelmed and irritable
- having conflicts with the person you care for
- having conflicts with family members
- feeling you don't have time for yourself or to be with others
- having no interest in doing activities you used to enjoy
- feeling emotional and moody, maybe crying often
- worrying about having enough money now and for the future
- using substances to help manage your feelings such as smoking more, drinking more alcohol, taking medications to help sleep or improve your mood, or taking illegal drugs

Tips to prevent caregiver stress

Too much stress can harm your health, especially if you care for someone for a long time. Here are some ways to help prevent and manage caregiver stress.

• Ask for help and accept help when offered.

- Look to others to help share the care.
- Make a list of ways others can help you such as pick up groceries or cook a meal.



• Set health goals for yourself.

- Make time to be physically active most days of the week.
- Make and eat healthy meals and snacks.
- Get enough sleep, even if it means taking a nap during the day.
- Take time to relax each day. Find a place in your home where you can have a few moments to relax, close your eyes, and do some deep breathing.
- Do things you enjoy.
- Give yourself a break. Take some time away from being a caregiver at least once a week.



Tips to prevent caregiver stress

- **Focus on what you can do.**

- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. You can't control everything.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Your home might not be as clean as you would like it to be.
- If you feel like it, eat a healthy breakfast for dinner or eat leftovers three or four days in a row. No one cares.

- **Seek support from family and friends.**

- Make an effort to stay connected with family and friends.
- Share your feelings, worries, and concerns with someone you are comfortable talking with about your situation.



- **Get connected with community supports.**

- Rather than struggling on your own, take advantage of local resources for caregivers.
- Explore opportunities for support in the home from health services. Talk to your health care provider or call 8-1-1 for information on what supports are available.

- **Stay as strong and healthy as possible.**

- Keep up with your own medical care.
- Get regular health checks. Make sure you tell your healthcare provider you are a caregiver.
- If you are feeling stressed, depressed, or unusually worried, the BC Heart Failure website has resources to help you.
- See your healthcare provider when you notice signs of caregiver stress or you feel really overwhelmed or depressed.

- **Communicate with the person you are caring for.**

- Talk with the person you are caring for about what would be helpful in giving care and helping to manage their heart failure.
- Help the person find ways that will work for them to do as much as possible on their own. This might include ways to remember when to take medications, to record daily weight, to keep track of fluids, to eat less salt, or to keep active.
- Agree on a plan of care so you don't feel like you are always telling or reminding.
- If the person is not doing what is needed to manage their health, talk to them about your worries or concerns. Remember you cannot make someone do something they do not want to do.
- Help the person prepare for medical appointments such as reviewing recent health and concerns, resting before the appointment, as well as taking all medications and a healthy snack to the appointment.
- If you can, go with the person to medical appointments. Take notes. Help communicate health concerns but be careful not to answer for the person. You are there to clarify what is going on at home.

As a caregiver, taking care of yourself is the most important, and most often forgotten, thing you can do.

When you take care of yourself, the person you give care to benefits too.