

Managing Anxiety for Caregivers

It is common for caregivers to experience anxiety, especially when navigating uncertainty, new responsibilities, and concern for a loved one.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, or unease that can make it difficult to focus, rest, or manage daily tasks. While some anxiety is normal, it can become overwhelming when it feels constant or hard to control.

Common causes of anxiety for caregivers

Caring for a loved one with cancer can bring new responsibilities, uncertainty, and emotional stress. It is common for caregivers to experience anxiety related to:

- Managing medical tasks or information you are unfamiliar with
- Feeling a loss of control over your routine or daily life
- Worrying about your loved one's health and well-being
- Uncertainty about the future
- Balancing caregiving with work, family, and other responsibilities
- Navigating your own emotions while supporting someone else
- Feeling like you don't have enough support
- Feeling responsible for ensuring your loved one eats, gets exercise, etc.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety

Anxiety can affect both your body and your emotions. You may notice:

- Constant or uncontrollable worry
- Feeling nervous, restless, or on edge
- Fatigue or low energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches or muscle tension
- Rapid heartbeat or shortness of breath
- Changes in appetite
- Feeling overwhelmed or easily irritated

If these symptoms are persistent or interfering with your daily life, it may be helpful to seek additional support.

Ways to manage anxiety

- Take small moments for yourself: it may feel difficult, or even selfish, to take time for yourself, but your well-being matters. Even a few minutes of rest, stepping outside, or doing something you enjoy can help reset your stress levels.
- Focus on what you can control: there are many parts of caregiving that feel uncertain. Try to focus your energy on what is within your control, such as organizing daily tasks, asking questions, or creating a simple plan for the day. It can also be helpful to notice what is outside your control and practice letting go of the pressure to manage or fix everything.
- Break tasks into manageable steps: caregiving can feel overwhelming when everything piles up at once. Prioritize what needs to be done now and take things one step at a time.
- Check in with yourself: take a moment to notice how you're feeling. Writing things down, talking with someone you trust, or simply pausing to reflect can help you process emotions instead of pushing them aside.
- Ask for help and accept it: you don't have to do everything on your own. Let others support you with meals, errands, or time away. Accepting help can reduce stress and make caregiving more manageable.
- Stay connected: spending time with friends, family, or other caregivers can help reduce feelings of isolation and provide emotional support.
- Try simple relaxation techniques: practices like deep breathing, stretching, or brief mindfulness exercise can help calm your body and mind. Even a few minutes can make a difference.
- Move your body when you can: light activity, like walking or getting fresh air, can help improve mood and reduce stress.
- Seek additional support if needed: if anxiety is affecting your daily life, consider speaking with a healthcare professional or mental health professional. Support groups and counseling can also be helpful.