

ASKING FOR AND ACCEPTING YOUR OWN SUPPORT: A CAREPARTNER RESOURCE

Similar to your loved one who has Parkinson's, it is important to make sure you, as a carepartner, are receiving the support you need to live a healthy life. Your own health can be a shared responsibility between you, your loved one, your family and friends, your health community and other communities that you belong to. It begins with doing all you can for yourself, and then learning to accept help when you need it.

It can be difficult to accept defeat as a carepartner. Know that asking for help does not mean you are weak or incapable. Remember that your role is a long distance race, not a sprint. Caring for a person with Parkinson's includes caring for yourself along the way.

As a carepartner, you may benefit most from seeking the help of others in your position. Parkinson Society BC offers many support groups for the Parkinson's community, including caregiver-only groups, and groups you can attend together with your loved one with Parkinson's. You may also connect with your peers through the PD Link program, which matches you to a fellow carepartner with whom you can share your experiences. Peer support can significantly improve your coping capacity, and provide you with a sense of togetherness and community.

Loneliness and isolation are common problems for carepartners, but both are avoidable. When you reach out to others, you open the door for others to reach out to you. Here are a few things that family, friends, and peers can do for you when you ask for and accept their help:

- Provide a listening ear, and a shoulder to lean on.
- Take on your caregiving duties temporarily, to afford you a break.
- Socialize with you in contexts where you are not in your carepartner role.
- Offer support with small tasks such as housework or shopping.
- Help you talk through and make decisions related to your caregiving duties.

If you are currently a carepartner, start by recognizing that you are one, that you are not alone, and that there is a range of supports available to help you.

Accept help.

You owe it to yourself.

You owe it to your loved one.

You owe it to the people who care about you.

Taking Care of You – Carepartner Self-Care Checklist

- Caregiving can be very stressful - acknowledge this.
- Take care of your own needs. Take a regular break from your caregiving duties to rest & renew energy.
- Set aside regular times to do things you enjoy, like taking a bath, visiting with friends, watching a TV show from start to finish, reading, getting your hair done, listening to music, or catching up on your sleep. Remember this is your time to rest and recharge your batteries.
- Exercise – walk, swim, jog, play golf, or work in the garden. Do some stretching. Try Tai Chi or Yoga.
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Good nutrition is important to your health.
- Have regular check-ups. Talk to your doctor about any health problems. Use medications with care.
- Try to get enough sleep. Although it may be difficult, sleep is important for staying healthy. If you have trouble getting to sleep, try breathing or relaxation exercises (there are books or tapes to help).
- Build a support network. Keep in touch with friends. You need a life apart from your caring role. If you cut yourself off, you are also cutting off the support that friends will give you. You will find it hard to pick up the pieces of your life when you are no longer spending so much time caregiving. You might like to join a support group. It is a good way to meet new people who have the same concerns you do.
- Don't try to be a superhero. Be realistic. Think about what really matters most to you. Let the less important things wait, and learn to say “no”.
- Think about your supports and use them. Talk with other family or friends who could share some of your responsibilities.
- Find out what resources are available in your community, and make contact before or when you need help.
- Reward yourself. Remember to congratulate yourself for all your successes, however small you feel they are.

–

Adapted from the Fraser Health Handbook for Caregivers, available at bit.ly/2RzETUA.