

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH SECONDARY BREAST CANCER

INTRODUCTION

Caring for a person with cancer can be demanding physically, emotionally and sometimes financially.

Carers and caregivers provide unpaid help and support to others with cancer who could not otherwise manage without this help. Carers may be partners, parents, other family members, friends or neighbours.

Being a carer for someone will often include giving them emotional support, helping with daily tasks, helping with personal care, taking them to and attending appointments with them. It may also involve contact with other people such as health and social care professionals.

The emotional impact of cancer can be significant for carers. Many carers feel a range of different emotions, including shock, anxiety, worry, fear, sadness and grief. It's also very common to feel angry and frustrated at times too.

You might not think of yourself as being a carer, particularly if the person you are caring for is someone close to you. However, recognising your caring role is important so you get the support you need. Having support may allow you to enjoy time more with the person you care for.

Knowing that the person you are caring for will not get better can be very difficult to cope with and may also affect your own physical and mental health, so looking after yourself is important.

HELP AND SUPPORT

Help and support is available for carers. Your GP can provide support to you at this time along with the treatment team or palliative care team looking after the person you are caring for. They can also tell you what support is available in your area.

If you need any medical advice about the person you are caring for, you can contact their GP, specialist nurse, or a member of their treatment or palliative care team providing you have been given permission

There are a number of carers' organisations that offer help and support, some of which are listed at the end of this leaflet.

Respite care

If you provide ongoing care at home, respite care allows you to take a break. This means that someone else can take over your caring responsibilities for a short period of time, whether this is a few hours at home or a few days in a residential home or hospice.

You can ask your healthcare team or social services about what is available in your area. Your GP, district nurse or palliative care nurse may be able to arrange longer breaks.

Some charities, such as The Respite Association, can help with respite breaks for carers. The Carers Trust or Carers UK can also provide information about what may be available in your area.

Caring for yourself

Carers often need personal space and time to themselves to help them cope. Looking after yourself enables you to think about your own needs and get the right support. This in turn can often also help you be a more effective carer.

It's not unusual for carers to feel guilty about taking time out for themselves. You may not eat as well as you would normally, or you may find you aren't sleeping as well, which leads to feeling tired and run down.

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The Cancer, Caring, Coping website (qub.ac.uk/sites/CancerCaringCoping) shares the experiences of cancer caregivers who want to give support, advice and tips for coping in a caring role. They also offer guidance to carers on how to look after themselves as well the person they are caring for.

Tips for looking after yourself as a carer

- Look after your emotional wellbeing by getting support if you need it
- Prioritise, don't try to do too many things, decide what's important, and put everything else to one side
- Talk to someone. Sharing your worries and fears can make you feel less alone. You could talk to a family member or a close friend, or someone trained to listen like your GP or a counsellor. You may also want to contact a carers' organisation (see overleaf)
- Connect with other carers. Many people find it helpful to talk to other people in similar situations, for example through online forums or local support groups
- Make time for yourself to sleep, relax and rest so that you don't get too tired and are able to cope better. Get out for some fresh air and exercise, even a short walk, each day
- Try to continue to connect socially with others, and keep up with your usual hobbies and activities to maintain some normality
- Accept or ask for help from friends and family so you don't feel that you have to cope with everything on your own. Sometimes people don't know how to help, so it may be useful to think of specific tasks they could do
- Look after your health. If you're feeling unwell, tired or low, talk to your GP
- Ask for help. Practical, financial and emotional support is available from social services and charities. Carers have a legal right to an assessment by an Adult Social Care team which can help access support
- Make an 'emergency plan' in case for any reason you can't perform your caring role, for example if you are ill

Finance and employment

Finance and the impact on their job or career is a concern for many carers. Talking to your employer will help them understand your situation and hopefully be more supportive.

Carers' rights at work are protected by law. If you are caring for someone with secondary breast cancer, you may be able to ask for flexible working arrangements or carer's leave to help you find a balance between work and your caring responsibilities.

Social workers can also offer support at this time and may be able to talk to your employer on your behalf.

Financial support for carers is available through Carer's Allowance. If you are looking after someone for 35 hours a week or more, and the person you care for already receives a qualifying disability benefit (for example Personal Independence Payment), then you may be eligible for Carer's Allowance.

As well as Carer's Allowance, you may also be eligible to receive further financial support, including Universal Credit, a council tax reduction and Pension Credit (if you have reached State Pension age).

You can find more information on benefits for carers on the gov.uk website.

You can also find information about rights at work, benefits and help with finances on the Macmillan Cancer Support, Working with Cancer, Age UK and Carers UK websites (see right).

FINDING HELP AND SUPPORT

Breast Cancer Now

Our Helpline and Ask Our Nurses service doesn't just support people diagnosed with breast cancer. We are here for their carers too. You can call our Helpline to discuss any concerns on **0808 800 6000**, or you can submit a question to our nurses on our website **breastcancernow.org**

Other organisations

Age UK

ageuk.org.uk

Advice Line: 0800 678 1602 open 8am to 7pm, every day of the year.

Age UK provides advice and practical and emotional help when you're looking after someone.

Carers Trust

carers.org

Carers Trust is a major charity for, with and about carers. They work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

Carers UK

carersuk.org

Helpline: 0808 808 7777

A supportive community and national campaigner for better recognition and support for carers. The Carers UK website contains a wealth of information on topics including financial support, practical support, health and wellbeing advice and support for carers to take a much-deserved break.

gov.uk

Find out about benefits for carers.

Macmillan Cancer Support

macmillan.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 0000

Macmillan Cancer Support has information about caring for someone with advanced cancer. They also offer information on finances and benefits.

The Respite Association

respitassociation.org

01566 783383

The Respite Association funds appropriately qualified respite care for disabled, sick, elderly or terminally ill people so their regular unpaid carer can take a much-needed break.

Working with Cancer

workingwithcancer.co.uk

An organisation that helps employees, employers, the self-employed, job seekers and carers to manage cancer and work.

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