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## Palliative care – looking after yourself

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### Summary

- When providing palliative care to someone with a life-limiting illness, you can access support to help you and your family.
  - Eating and sleeping well, relaxing, exercising regularly and looking after your own health can help give you the energy and vitality you need for your role as carer.
  - Carer support services and respite care can help you to take a break from your caring role. Ask your palliative care service about your respite care options.
  - When times get tough, it may help to seek out professional counselling services. Start by speaking to your doctor or palliative care service.
  - Carers Victoria provides counselling and practical resources to support you in your caring role.
  - Palliative Care Victoria provides a useful guidebook for carers looking after someone with a life-limiting illness.
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When caring for a loved one with a life-limiting illness, it is important to look after your own health and wellbeing so that you will have the energy and strength required for your role as carer. There is support available to help you and your family through these difficult times.

### Your relationship with the person you are caring for

It is normal to have ups and downs as part of your relationship with the person you are caring for. The stress of coming to terms with a life-limiting illness, the impact this has on a family and the physical and mental exhaustion of caring for someone can all take a toll. Your relationship can become strained, while at other times it may feel stronger than ever.

While caring for someone, it is important to keep the communication channels open. You may find it difficult to talk with the person you are caring for about their illness and the possible eventuality of dying. For some people, it can help to use humour, but you need to be sensitive to the mood of the person in case the humour is not well received.

### Your health and wellbeing

It can be easy to put your own needs last, but it is important if you are feeling tired or stressed to look after yourself so you are still able to care for the person that needs you the most.

It is important for you to keep doing the activities you enjoy outside of your caring role. Taking regular breaks from caring will help you avoid becoming worn out. Eating and sleeping well, relaxing, being physically active and looking after your own health can give you the energy and vitality you need for your role as carer.

Carer support and respite care services can help you to take a break from your caring role. Ask your palliative care service about your respite care options. You could have a volunteer stay with your loved one while you take a short break. If you need a longer break, you could book some time with respite services for the person you are caring for, so you can have some time away to rest and recuperate.

If you are feeling distressed, frustrated, guilty, exhausted, or annoyed, it is important to know that these feelings are normal. If you are finding your role as a carer overwhelming, it may help to discuss your feelings with your doctor or a counsellor.

### Your emotional health

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The emotional demands of caring for someone with a life-limiting illness can be high. As a carer, it is important to look after your own emotional needs. This is important so you can continue your caring role.

Friends and family can offer significant support, but you may find it helpful to speak with a healthcare professional such as a counsellor. Often someone without an emotional connection to you or the person you care for will help you see things clearly. A counsellor can also help by:

- suggesting strategies for managing relationships
- giving you ideas for keeping communication channels open
- advising you of ways to balance your caring role with your own needs.

Many healthcare professionals can offer you some level of counselling support. Start by speaking with your general practitioner. Your doctor may then refer you to a specialised counselling service, if needed.

### **Carers Victoria advisory line**

Carers Victoria provides counselling and practical resources to support you in your caring role.

### Contact the **Carers Victoria advisory line**

on 1800 242 636 from anywhere in Victoria between 8.30 am – 4.30 pm Monday to Friday (except for public holidays). The advisory line provides information and support for caring families in Victoria.

### **Palliative care guidebook for carers**

Palliative Care Victoria has a useful guidebook for carers called Supporting a person who needs palliative care: a guide for family and friends. The book is provided free of charge and is available from the **Palliative Care Victoria** website.

### **Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Your palliative care provider
- **Palliative Care Victoria**, call **(03) 9662 9644**
- **Carers Victoria Advisory Line**, call **1800 242 636**

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