

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF WHILE YOU ARE CARING FOR YOUR CHILD

A tip sheet for parents and carers, written by parents who have cared for a child with cancer



When caring for a child who is unwell, it is common to experience a wide range of emotions. For you to be able to care for your unwell child, you also need to take care of yourself. Some general tips on how to look after yourself when your child has been diagnosed with cancer are listed below.

1

Make some time for yourself each day, even if it's only 10 minutes. Plan this time in advance so that you can fit it in. Ask family and friends to help you so that you can have a break.

2

Let your family and friends know that sometimes you would like to talk about things other than your unwell child.

3

Try to eat well. This will help give you the energy you need to look after your child. Information about eating a balanced diet can be found at www.eatforhealth.gov.au

4

Try to get enough rest. Being tired can make you feel more stressed and irritable, making it harder to look after your child and the rest of your family.

5

Exercise for 15-30 minutes per day. Exercise can help you to sleep better at night, improve your mood and make you feel more energetic. If you need to stay at home to care for your child, you could do some yoga/pilates exercises or use a stationary bike so that you don't have to leave the house.

6

Continue to have check-ups with your own doctor.
You need to look after yourself to be able to care for your child.

7

As a parent you may worry about your other children if you are spending a lot of time in the hospital with your unwell child. Try to:

- include your other children in the care of your unwell child
- ask your other children how they feel about their sibling being unwell. Give them the opportunity to talk about their fears
- keep your other children informed about what is happening with your unwell child's treatment so that they don't feel left out
- try to make some time each day (even if it is only 10 minutes) to spend with your other children. Allow them to choose what they would like to do during this time.

8

Avoid using alcohol, cigarettes or recreational drugs to deal with your stress.

9

Try to be organised. Prioritise tasks and activities and concentrate on one task at a time. Use a diary to help you to remember appointments and important things you need to get done. If you are finding it difficult to get everything done, ask friends and family to help out.

10

Try to focus on the positive side of caring. It can help to concentrate on:

- the new skills you are learning as a carer
- the fact that you are demonstrating love and commitment to your child by caring for them while they are unwell
- the satisfaction that comes from being able to help your child.

11

Talk to your family and friends about how you feel about caring for your unwell child.

Spend time with your partner, family and friends away from the hospital bedside if you can.

12

If your child is older and caring for them requires you to lift them or help them to move, **seek advice on correct lifting techniques from the physiotherapist** involved in your child's care.

13

You may worry about your child's grandparents while your child is unwell. Try to:

- include grandparents in the care of your child
- keep them up to date about your child's treatment
- allow them to help you out when they offer
- thank them for their help.

It is important to understand that you can't look after somebody else properly if you are not looking after yourself. If you are not coping or are feeling depressed you should see your doctor.

Further information for families can be found at www.vics.org.au/pics

This tip sheet has been written by the Children's Cancer Centres Parent Advisory Group (PAG) with the support of the Paediatric Integrated Cancer Service (PICS). The PAG are a group of parents of cancer patients and staff representatives who work together to improve the care of children with cancer.

Disclaimer: For education and information only. Content is accurate at the time of publication, however over time information may change. Always get advice from your health care team for answers to your medical questions.

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