

Caring for your Loved One

"Hello."

"Hi Dr. Langston."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

After she was diagnosed with leukemia, Leah Davis spent weeks in the hospital getting chemotherapy and other treatments. Her sister Christi was right by her side the whole time.

"Christi would come, and she would stay with me every night in the hospital. And then she would get up and get herself ready and go to work in the morning. She was there for me. Always there."-Leah, Patient

And as Leah underwent further treatment, Christi took care of everything—from shuttling her back and forth to doctor's appointments several times a week, to managing her finances.

"She was there throughout the whole thing. And it was needed, it was needed."-Leah, Patient

Caregivers like Christi are a lifeline for people with cancer. Whether they're a sibling, spouse, parent, or adult child, they take over jobs like filling prescriptions, grocery shopping, making meals, paying bills, and coordinating care with the medical team. For many caregivers, the role is new, and they have to figure it out as they go.

"I realized that, probably a week or two into the diagnosis, we were in a process. And understanding what that process was, and reading about that process, and how does this really work? What does this really mean? And just moving forward from there."-Christi, Patient's Sister

A caregiver also offers emotional support, cheering on their loved one through treatment, and offering a shoulder to cry on in tough times.

"Sometimes it's just...they just need a hug, they need a kiss you know. They just need you to be there and just listen."-Christi, Patient's Sister

Caregiving can be satisfying and rewarding, but it's also hard work. Often, you have to juggle your loved one's needs and responsibilities with your own.

"Caregiving for someone who is getting treated for cancer can feel overwhelming at times. When you're managing medical bills and prescriptions and appointments, but at the same time thinking about your work or your responsibilities at home can be very exhausting."-Dr. Wendy Baer, MD, Psychiatric Oncologist

Becoming overworked and overstressed can lead to caregiver burnout and depression. That's not good for you—or the person you're caring for.

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"Caregivers do best when they take care of themselves. You're best able to do your work, your job of taking care of somebody going through cancer treatment, when you feel rested. When you feel well nourished."-
Dr. Wendy Baer, MD, Psychiatric Oncologist

In addition, you can help yourself by having other family members and friends pitch in. Take time to do things you enjoy—like having lunch with a friend or going to a movie. When you get overwhelmed, see a therapist or join a support group for cancer caregivers. And sometimes, you need to walk away for a while to give yourself a break.

"You have to have vacations from it a little bit, so you can regroup and be ready to prepare to support the patient again. Those vacations are really important because they let you get back to your life for just a moment or two, and then you can throw it all in to support the family member."-Dr. Sagar Lonial, MD, Oncologist

"When I needed to step back, I was like, "I need to step back. I'm not going to come tonight." I can probably count on my hand how many times I didn't go see Leah."-Christi, Patient's Sister

"It was a big comfort for you to help me the way that you did."-Leah, Patient

Family caregivers like Christi don't get a paycheck. But the rewards to both the caregiver and the person with cancer are immeasurable.

"For me, I'd never looked at it as a struggle or an inconvenience. It was my service."-Christi, Patient's Sister

"That meant everything to me. That meant life to me. It meant that I had someone there to support me."-
Leah, Patient

"I don't think there's anything that I've done that I would do any differently. I wouldn't change it."-Christi,
Patient's Sister

"Yeah it was beautiful, and I thank you."

"You're welcome."

"I would drop it all and she would be the focus, for sure."-Christi, Patient's Sister