

Tips for Caregivers

Keep Visits Brief

While it is often very uplifting to the patient to have visitors, it can be exhausting as well. Call before you visit at home or the hospital and make sure if it is a good time. Keep your visits brief, 15-20 minutes, unless you are told otherwise.

For the person going through treatment, their energy level can vary. On any given day they can't predict when they may or may not be up for visitors. As the primary caregiver, don't be afraid to ask people before they come to visit to keep their visit short. Do not be afraid to tactfully cut a visit short if the patient appears tired. Often we don't want to discourage visitors or feel badly if the patient tires after only 10 minutes into a visit. The patient's comfort and energy level are of the utmost importance. Don't be afraid to be honest. The patient cannot always do that for him or herself. That is where it's nice for the caregiver to step in and take the lead.

Write down questions for the doctor

This advice is for the patient as well as for the caregiver. If treatment is being done in the hospital, try to find out if the doctors have a standard time that they make rounds. That way you, or someone else, can be there as a second set of ears to hear what the doctor has to say. This can also be helpful during doctor's appointments as well. Be sure to ask the patient if they would like you to accompany him or her or to be present when the doctor makes rounds. Ultimately it is the patient's choice and he/she does have the right to privacy.

Patient Advocate

It is good to have someone accompany the patient to doctor's appointments or to be with the patient as often as possible (consistent with the patient's desires) during treatment to alert hospital staff to the patient's needs and to supplement hospital staff in meeting some of the patient's comfort (i.e., non medical) needs.

Related to this however, be mindful of the others in the waiting rooms and treatment areas. Restrict the number of visitors, keep noise and other distractions to a minimum, and do not bring in strong smelling foods.

Importance of Touch

Don't underestimate the importance of human contact. Most patients find massage very soothing. **MAKE SURE YOU CHECK WITH THE DOCTOR** before doing any kind of massage. Usually neck and shoulder massage, head massage or foot massages are very effective. Again, please check with the doctor to make

sure it is ok, in case of blood clots or other complications.

Even if massage is not recommended, or is uncomfortable, you can hold the patient's hand or hug him or her when you visit. Often times cancer treatment can feel like an out-of-body experience. The loss of hair and weight can make a patient feel like he or she is looking at a stranger. Touching the patient helps to ground them and reconnect them to themselves and to you. Not to mention, it is very comforting.

Take time for yourself –*This is particularly important if you are the primary caregiver.*

Be sure to eat well and get plenty of rest. This is not only for you, but also for the patient. Taking care of yourself ensures that you have the stamina to continue to be there in whatever capacity you can for the patient. Often times the caregiver's life becomes focused on the hospital and doctor's appointments. Take-out food and vending machine diets get old quickly and sap your energy as well. Make sure to take a break get some good food and rest. Do something for yourself even if it is just a 10-minute walk, a ½ hour to watch your favorite TV show (preferably a comedy; laughter is good for you), or whatever you find relaxing. Maybe treat yourself to a massage or other spa service. Again, it will ensure that you can maintain a support system for the patient.