

Supporting a Loved One with a Chronic Condition

Studies reveal that people who have chronic conditions adjust better when they have a network of people behind them. If you are providing support, there may be times when you find it challenging to balance taking care of yourself and supporting your loved one at the same time. It is possible to help your family member and meet your needs too. Here are a few tips that may help:



Clarify the ways you can help. Recognize and be clear on what you can give and what you can't. Think about the various levels of support that you can do. Can you be available on the phone instead of face-to-face? Or can you help make meals instead of supporting with transportation to appointments?

Reflect and adapt. Take a time out for some introspection and openly assess your reactions and motives for helping your loved one. Is your instinct to dive in and help, avoid, or feel angry? Or are you helping them to fill a need inside of you? Identify and acknowledge these responses, even if they seem irrational. The more honest you are with yourself, the easier it will be to respond in the most supportive, helpful way possible.

Bridge the gap with communication. Don't know what to say or do around your loved one? Let them know. Be clear on how you want to help them and ask them if this is something that they want. Share how you feel if you are unsure of how to respond. You don't have to fix the situation, just be open and authentic.

Put yourself in your loved one's shoes. Helping and supporting a chronically ill friend or relative can be trying. Stress, discomfort, or pain may make your loved one irritable or unresponsive. When these moments arise, remain patient and calm and remind yourself of the mental and physical struggle your loved one is enduring.

Know your limits. It's OK to step back from time to time to take care of yourself so you don't burn out. There will be days or weeks when you don't have the energy to help anyone but yourself. It's important you take some time for yourself to rejuvenate and rest. There is no shame in saying no, especially if you are physically or emotionally unable to help.

Find support. Don't try to go it alone. Share your fears, stresses, and triumphs and connect with others in similar situations. Join organizations that provide support and information to caregivers or family members of people affected by chronic conditions, such as Family Caregiver Alliance or Caregiver Action Network. Some groups deal with chronic illness in general, while others address the concerns and challenges of specific conditions.

Contact Caterpillar's Global Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP has additional resources on managing stress, finding local services, staying on top of health issues, and coping with job-related issues you may face as a working caregiver. Visit [CaterpillarEAP.com](https://www.caterpillar.com/eap) or call 866-CAT(228)-0565.

Your presence and support are the most meaningful gifts you can give to a loved one living with a chronic condition. Remember to take care of yourself, too. You need to be in good shape to care for them.

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