


If you are caring for a family member or friend with cancer, try using this recommended FOCUS programme to help prevent caregiver stress and strain. When a caregiver is highly distressed, it can have a negative impact on the patient's long-term outcome and the caregiver's own psychological and physical health.<sup>1</sup>

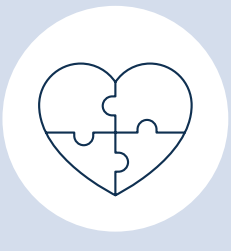
## F Family involvement

	Set-up open, honest, and ongoing communication about the illness. Set aside time for regular general talk to share concerns <sup>1,2</sup>
	Establish boundaries and expectations so that you are all on the same page <sup>3</sup>
	Provide mutual support, so that it is not just the caregiver caring for the patient, but vice versa as well <sup>1</sup>
	Work together as a team – share problems and work together to resolve them <sup>1,2</sup>
	Don't go it alone. Organise respite care. <sup>4</sup> Reach out to family members, friends or a support group. <sup>4</sup> Ask one trusted person to be your personal assistant. This person can check in with you, help you send status updates to the rest of the family or friends, help coordinate tasks that others can take care of <sup>3</sup>


## O Optimistic attitude

	Set short-term goals and maintain a hopeful outlook, in spite of the cancer diagnosis <sup>1</sup>
	Identify each other's strengths as it helps to build confidence and avoid feeling overwhelmed <sup>1</sup>
	Look after your mental health – speak to a friend, family member, support group <sup>4</sup>
	Stress management practices such as walking, meditating may help relieve stress <sup>5</sup>
	Return to nature – restorative activities such as spending time in nature (gardening, a walk in the park, enjoying a beautiful view) can help restore cognitive function and improve decision making <sup>1</sup>
Consult a doctor if your anxiety or depression is severe as you may require treatment <sup>6,7</sup>	


## C Coping effectiveness

	Use active versus avoidant coping strategies e.g. problem solving or acceptance versus denial <sup>1</sup>
	Engage in enjoyable activities e.g. family movie night, a gentle walk outside, sitting in the garden
	Engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours to reduce stress and to take care of yourself <sup>1-5</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Exercise</li> <li>■ Get enough restful sleep</li> <li>■ Get the flu shot</li> <li>■ Maintain a healthy weight</li> <li>■ Eat lots of fruits and vegetables e.g. Mediterranean diet</li> <li>■ Limit alcohol and stop smoking</li> </ul>
	Take time for yourself - creating cancer-free moments and spaces in your daily life will provide important respite from the physical and mental work of caregiving. Taking time to relax, exercise or see a good friend will help you take care of your own health to keep you going for the long haul <sup>3</sup>

## U Uncertainty reduction

	Empower yourself - get as much information as possible from the doctor, oncology nurse or support groups* more confident caregivers provide better care, feel less fatigue and strain themselves, and have more positive moods <sup>1,5</sup>
	Go to patient's appointments together and bring a list of your questions <sup>2</sup>

## S Symptom management

	Monitor and address your physical and emotional symptoms e.g. fatigue levels, sleeplessness, mood, anxiety, recurrent infections <sup>5</sup>
	Get regular health checkups <sup>2,4</sup>
	Utilise referrals to professional services e.g. counselling, social work, financial services, spiritual care, cleaning services, hospice <sup>2</sup>



Cancer caregiver support groups can be found at:

<https://canceralliance.co.za/cancer-in-sa/useful-cancer-resources/support-groups/>

<https://cancarecare.co.za/counselling-support/>

<https://relayforlife.org.za>

Facebook: Cancer buddies

CANSA Facebook page – CANSA Caring for the Caregivers

CANSA's Help Desk Toll Free No: 0800226622

CANSA's whatsapp No: 072 197 9305 (English & Afrikaans)  
or 071 867 3530 (isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati, Sesotho and Setswana)

CANSA's email at [info@cansa.org.za](mailto:info@cansa.org.za)

The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a healthcare professional. E&OE. Life Healthcare Group Ltd does not accept any responsibility for any loss or damage suffered by the reader as a result of the information provided.

1 Northouse LL. *Helping Patients and Their Family Caregivers Cope With Cancer*. *Oncol Nurs Forum* 2012;39(5):500-506

2 Northouse LL, Katapodi MC, Schafenacker AM, Weiss D. *The Impact of Caregiving on the Psychological Well-Being of Family Caregivers and Cancer Patients*. *Sem Oncol Nurs* 2012;28(4):236-245

3 Hoeg BL, Bidstrup P. *Informal caregivers: the invisible people caring for cancer survivors*. [online] 2020 Nov 26 [cited 2023 Apr 24]. Available from: <https://www.evidentlycochrane.net/informal-caregivers/>

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Cancer Caregivers: Caring for Yourself*. [online] 2022 Jun 9 [cited 2022 Jul 18]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/caregivers/caring-for-yourself.html>

5 Bevans MF, Sternberg EM. *Caregiving Burden, Stress, and Health Effects Among Family Caregivers of Adult Cancer Patients*. *JAMA* 2012;307(4):398-403

6 Jansson MRN, von Heymann-Horan A, Rasmussen BK, Albieri V, Frederiksen K, Suppli N, et al. *Risk for use of antidepressants, anxiolytics, and hypnotics in partners of glioma patients – A nationwide study covering 19 years of prescriptions*. *Psycho-Oncol* 2018;27:1930-1936

7 Salem H, Andersen EW, Dalton SO, Schmiegelow K, Winther JF, Lichtenthal WG, et al. *Use of psychotropic medication in parents of children diagnosed with cancer: a population-based study*. *Pediatr* 2019;143(5):doi:10.1542/peds.2018.2605