



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an endeavor to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Information and Referral Specialists address topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions and an Information and Referral Specialist will reply.

Caregiving From a Male's Perspective

When I first heard the news that my wife had cancer, it was as if I could not inhale-only exhale. The news was devastating beyond comprehension. The first question that crossed my mind was would I still have my best friend in a year or would she become another depressing statistic? After a few hours, I was able to snap back to reality and begin to help my wife face her fears.

Because of the type of cancer and the size of the mass, she was scheduled for a modified radical mastectomy in two days. We did not have time to get a second opinion, but we were able to ask some other oncologists questions about what was going on and felt somewhat comfortable with our decision.

However, if you and your wife do not feel comfortable for any reason with a doctor's diagnosis or prescribed treatment, definitely seek another opinion and ask as many questions as you deem necessary. There is no such thing as a stupid question when it comes to the health of our loved one.

After the surgery is over and the healing begins, you may get more overwhelmed than you ever could have imagined. You will need to be there to help your wife do things that she can no longer do alone, things that were so simple for her, before.

If you have the joy of having children, as we do, the work that you do never seems to end. Combine this with still having to go to your regular job, and you will soon find that there is no time in the day for you. When this cycle continues for an extended period of time, you can reach the edge of an emotional cliff. You may suffer emotional exhaustion, or as the professionals call it, caregiver burnout.

What seems to make things worse is that people are constantly asking in-depth questions about how your wife is doing, but few, if any, about how you are doing, when people did ask me how I was doing, I almost felt selfish or as if I was complaining when I told the truth.

You should not feel selfish. When people ask how you are doing, be honest. Being honest helps to cleanse the emotions that are built up inside. The emotions could be fear, anger, resentment, sadness or anything. Each person deals with this situation in a different manner. Letting someone else know how you feel will give them insight as to why you are acting the way you are. Ignoring your emotions will only cause problems. Let them out and deal with them; This will not make you less of a man. Instead, it will make you more of a stable man.

In the beginning, you may find that you sacrifice most of yourself in order to establish a caregiving routine, but after the routine is set, try to take some time for yourself. Do not feel selfish for doing this. It is necessary to keep your sanity while in the midst of things over which you have no control.

Try to do something for yourself every day. It does not need to be planned, expensive or lengthy. Take an extra 10 minutes getting to work in the morning and listen to your favorite tape or take the scenic way home. If friends, neighbors or family are helping, take time to treat yourself to something you have not done in a long time. Whatever it is, do something just for you.

Caregiver burnout is not your wife's fault or anyone's. It is only one of the side effects of healing. Realize that you are a very important part of the healing process, both physically and emotionally. If you are burnt-out or stressed-out, you can't create a good healing environment.

Everyone wants to get through the ordeal as quickly and safely as possible. Recognizing in advance that there is a possibility for added stress and having an idea of how to deal with it can help to improve the healing environment. You will have time to do things with your wife after the healing is done. In the meantime, don't forget yourself.

*This article was adapted from the insert, *The Male Perspective: Caregiver Burnout*, Caregiver101.com by Judd Lewis Parsons.*

Note: This is for informational purposes only.

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers with these documents, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
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