

## **Information for Caregivers**

[Narrator]

Cancer affects the whole family, and it's important to talk about the stress and problems of family members and friends.

If you're helping someone you love get through cancer treatment, you are a caregiver. A caregiver can be a family member or friend. Caregiving can involve many different activities. Helping with daily activities, personal care, coordinating care and services, and giving emotional and spiritual support are just a few of the ways you can give care.

What comes naturally for most caregivers is to put our own feelings and needs on hold and to focus on the person with cancer. This may work for a short time, but it can be hard to keep this up. It can be hard on you, and it can be hard for your loved one.

[Kaya]

My name is Kaya. My husband Sam and I were in to see his doctor for follow up and treatment planning. We were discussing his chemo scheduled for the next week and my husband laughingly said, "I guess I'm ready to turn everything over to Kaya for the next month. She has a hard time letting me do anything because I get tired. I wish she could let me push myself to do some things. I wouldn't feel like such a big lump." I laughed along with him, but I was a little upset. Our social worker noticed this and said several other women had coffee in an adjacent room while their partners got chemo. She suggested I join them, that it might help to talk to other caregivers.

One of the people there was a woman named Susan. We quickly learned we had a lot in common. Our husbands were both in treatment. We both struggled between addressing their every need and backing off and not saying anything when they pushed themselves to go to work or get

out in the yard. We could see how tired they were, but didn't want to take away from them feeling they were doing what needed to be done.

Susan helped me to not feel alone. Once a week, I was able to talk to her and others who truly understood how I felt because they were in the same place. We talked about our feelings. Traded stories and advice. We were there for each other. When I'm struggling, I give Susan a call. It helps me get through hard times.

[Narrator]

Taking care of yourself as the caregiver can help you be a better caregiver. It's important in giving you the strength you need to do what needs to be done. Some ideas for taking care of yourself include:

- Give yourself an outlet for your thoughts and feelings.
- Find comfort. Think about what makes you happy or relaxed and do it.
- Join a support group or find a "buddy" who's in a similar situation.
- Talk to a counselor.
- Share special moments with your loved ones.
- Look for positive moments in every day.
- Laugh.
- Be grateful.
- Write in a journal.
- Do regular activities as much as possible.
- Learn as much as you can about your loved one's medical condition.

[Kaya]

One thing Susan did that helped was to ask each week if I'd done something to take care of myself.

These questions were like:

- Did I get my annual mammogram?
- Did I go to the dentist?
- Did I take my medications and vitamins?
- Did I eat healthy meals?
- Was I sleeping?
- Did I exercise?
- Did I relax with a book?

Susan helped me think about myself while still focusing on the most important person in my life, my husband.

[Narrator]

As a caregiver, remember to care for yourself. Your loved one will appreciate what you're doing. It will provide a balance to your relationship that will help keep it strong, especially during this difficult time.

Many caregivers find the experience changes them. Each is affected in a unique way. Each shows great courage in meeting the needs of their loved one, providing the support and comfort only they can provide.

[Kaya]

Caregiving means we also have to be successful problem solvers. Susan learned a five-step approach to problem solving that she shared. I tried it, and the steps helped me find better ways to care for my husband when he was dealing with fatigue. The steps are:

1. Identify and define the problem.

2. Gather information.
3. Plan your action.
4. Carry out your plan.
5. Evaluate your plan and make necessary changes.

Susan and I worked together on the fatigue problem, because both our husbands had it. We used the steps with our husbands and came up with ideas that really helped. One idea for my husband was including a nap in his day. He'd never been much of a nap taker, but once we tried it, we were really happy. We napped together and it gave us both energy to complete some extra things during the day. So it helped me to look at caregiving as problem solving. It was a positive approach for me and my husband.