



# TIPS

from the Consumer Health Action Network

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## Are you a caregiver?

### Helping someone with HIV/AIDS

Most people who provide care for a friend or family member don't think of themselves as a caregiver. Caregivers provide support to someone who needs help. It doesn't matter how many hours per week are spent providing support. Caregivers may live with the person they are caring for, providing assistance with daily needs, or may visit the person or call regularly.

Being a caregiver involves an investment in time and energy. Be sure to take care of yourself so that you stay healthy. Caregivers need breaks, exercise, and socializing. Support groups exist for almost every situation and are an excellent way to share information, find help, and deal with difficult situations with people who understand. Your loved one's health care provider or institution may know of a support group you could join.

### Helping a loved one who has HIV/AIDS:

If someone you love has HIV/AIDS, one of the best places for them to be cared for is at home. Remember that each person with AIDS is different and is affected by HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in different ways.

People with HIV/AIDS can get very sick from germs that may not make you sick. You need to be careful not to spread germs that can hurt the person you are caring for. Wash your hands, cover any sores, and keep sick people away. It is very important that both you and your loved one are fully vaccinated.

You cannot get HIV from the air, food, water, insects, animals, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, toilet seats, or anything else that doesn't involve blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or breast milk. You also cannot get HIV from feces, nasal fluid, saliva, sweat, tears, urine, or vomit, unless these have blood mixed in them.

As a caregiver for a loved one with HIV/AIDS, it is important for you to understand the medical care prescribed by the doctor. If you do not understand the doctor's instructions, make sure to ask questions. You are not expected to know everything.

- Get clear, written information about medicines and other care you may need to give. Ask what each medicine does, how much and when it should be taken, and what side effects you should look out for.
- Ask the doctor or nurse what changes in the person's health or behavior you should watch for.
- Ask who you should call for help or information if there is an emergency. Make a list of the names and phone numbers of doctors, nurses, and other important people who you might need to call quickly. Keep this list by the phone or somewhere you can find it easily.

You should get regular updates from your loved one's doctor or nurse on what kind of care is needed. Sometimes what is needed most is not medical care, but help with the normal chores of life: shopping, getting the mail, paying bills, and cleaning the house.

**Call the Consumer Health Action Network at 203-772-2817 or toll-free in CT at 888-873-4585 for more information.**