



TIPS

from the Consumer Health Action Network

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Are you a caregiver?

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 visit a doctor or hospital:

When your loved one visits a doctor or is admitted to the hospital, it is helpful to have their medical information available immediately. Having this information in writing makes it easier for doctors and nurses to coordinate care for your loved one.

- The patient's medical history
- A list of the patient's allergies
- A list of the patient's current medications and the dosages
- A list of the doctors who care for the patient now or in the past and their phone numbers
- The name of the insurance or managed care company responsible for covering the patient

Communicating your loved one's problems and symptoms can be very difficult. Simply saying he or she seems different than usual will not be enough for doctors to diagnose and treat your loved one. Break down the symptoms into categories that will help describe the problem:

- **Overall well-being:** Is your loved one eating and sleeping normally? Why or why not? Has their weight changed at all?
- **General condition:** Has your loved one been more tired than usual? Is there any abnormal bleeding, breathing, or coughing? Can they move their limbs normally? Have there been any rashes or skin changes? Have you tried any treatments that worked or didn't work?
- **Pain:** Is there pain? What does it feel like (sharp, dull, stabbing, achy)? Where is the pain and how long have they had it?
- **Medication:** Is your loved one currently taking any prescription medication or over-the-counter medications? How much and how often?
- **Emotional and mental well-being:** Is your loved one alert? Do they enjoy their normal activities? Are they angry?

Write down any questions you have for the doctor ahead of time and ask questions at the end to make sure you understand both the doctor's diagnosis and treatment. If you are going along with your loved one on a doctor's visit and you think you may have a lot to talk about, make a "consultation appointment," so the doctor can schedule plenty of time to talk with you.

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