



CAREGIVING WHILE LIVING WITH PAIN

Chronic pain can be overwhelming. Caring for someone else while you are in pain adds an extra layer of complexity. Managing care duties while living with pain can be difficult for several reasons including fatigue, managing multiple medical appointments, physical limitations, and stress. Caregivers living with invisible pain may also find it challenging to manage expectations that their loved ones may have of them.

Here are some practices for caregivers with pain to manage these challenges:

(1) PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion emphasizes kindness to yourself and recognizing your human experience. It is acknowledging, in the face of adversity, that we are doing our best and deserve to nurture ourselves. Self-criticism is the opposite of self-compassion. Research shows that self-compassionate people tend to be more caring and supportive in relationships and more compassionate and forgiving towards others (Neff, K. and Germer, C., 2018).

Furthermore, self-compassion can also be a supportive method for pain management. Remind yourself that no one is perfect and that your loved one appreciates all the ways you are helpful, caring, and understanding. Being connected to someone like you can make a world of difference!

- To learn more about self-compassion in relation to pain management, listen to [Pain BC's podcast episode on mindfulness and self-compassion](#).
- For more information on self-compassion and caregiving, listen to [Family Caregivers of BC's webinar on mindful self-compassion for caregivers](#).

(2) SET BOUNDARIES

Being a resilient family caregiver includes acknowledging the importance of your personal needs, especially when trying to manage chronic pain. Setting boundaries is an essential, yet difficult, aspect of pacing yourself to continue to be able to provide care. It doesn't mean you aren't dedicated to caring; quite the opposite. Setting boundaries allows you to continue to care with compassion and devotion, instead of feeling lost or consumed by the caregiving role. Here are some ways to set boundaries as a caregiver:

- Determine what parts of caregiving are something you, and only you, can fulfill. Ask yourself if someone else can meet the care recipient’s needs such as another family member, friend, or hired help.
- If possible, discuss your boundaries with the person you are caring for. Explain what you can do and what you can’t (or won’t) do. Explain with kindness and calmness why you are setting the boundary, e.g., work demands or other family obligations.
- Give yourself permission to schedule time to provide for your own needs. Taking care of yourself and setting boundaries are usually in direct conflict with feelings of guilt, fear or self-doubt. By acknowledging the importance of staying healthy yourself, it is easier to maintain your energy and perspective to continue to provide care for your care recipient.

(3) ASK FOR HELP

Asking for help is often hard because we don’t know what our needs are, we are fearful of being a bother, or we want to protect children and other family members from the situation. Other barriers include such beliefs such as thinking, “No one can do this as well as I can,” or feeling, “No one should do this but me.” However, asking for help is essential to the well-being of both the family caregiver and the person receiving care.

A helpful step is to begin with identifying your needs. You may find it helpful to use this [Understanding Your Caregiver Needs worksheet](#) to identify and document your current needs as a caregiver. You may also find it useful to view a [list of common caregiver needs](#).

Since pain is often invisible, your loved friends, neighbours and family may not realize that you need help. They may want to contribute but may not know how. You may get more support when you ask for help and discuss your needs with others. It can be helpful to create a list of tasks you need help with that you can match with people who offer to support you in your caregiving.

(4) FIND SUPPORT

Informal and formal support exists in many formats, for example, through your local Health Authority or community or support groups. [Contact your Health Authority](#) to see what services are available to you, such as home support and respite.

Businesses, as well as community and volunteer agencies, offer support services to reduce your load. You may consider contacting the BC Caregiver Support Line (1-877-520-3267), the Pain Support Line (1-844-880-7246), or contact BC 2-1-1 for recommendations on services near you.

Many people also enjoy having a group of peers to talk to who are experiencing similar situations. It may be easier to set boundaries and be accountable with the support of a group or a trusted confidante.

RESOURCES

- [Caregiver Support Line \(BC\): 1-877-520-3267](#)
- [Pain Support Line: 1-844-880-PAIN \(7246\)](#)
- [Helpful tips about setting boundaries as a caregiver](#)
- [Communicating about your pain with your loved ones](#)
- [Family caregiver support groups](#)
- [Pain Support & Wellness Groups](#)
- [Caregiver Learning Center](#)
- [LivePlanBe](#)
- [Financial assistance guide - Family Caregivers of BC](#)

Developed in collaboration with Family Caregivers of British Columbia



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INFORMATION TAKEN FROM:

[Living with chronic pain](#)