

BEING A CAREGIVER FOR SOMEONE LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN

It takes strength, patience, and energy to support a person living with pain. It feels hard because it is hard. Your relationship may feel tense, you may not know what they expect, and you may feel overwhelmed. You may feel frustrated with a lack of formal and informal support and may fear it's more than you can handle. However, you are not alone. The following support tools and strategies may help you.

AM I A CAREGIVER?

It can be difficult to identify as a caregiver to a person living with pain, as your responsibilities as a support person are ever-changing and evolving. A definition of a family or friend caregiver is, “a family member or friend who gives unpaid care to an adult, either at home or in a facility, who has a physical or mental health condition, chronic illness or frailty due to aging.” Please take a moment to complete this [questionnaire](#) to identify if you are a family or friend caregiver.

SUPPORT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS

(1) Learn about the experiences of living with complex pain and providing care for someone with complex pain

Supporting someone with chronic pain can present unique challenges. For instance, your friend or family member may need support with managing household tasks, the emotional impacts of pain, finances, and/or personal care continuously or from time to time. Your day-to-day responsibilities as a caregiver may change and evolve.

Further challenges of caring for someone with complex pain could include:

- Difficulty for you as the caregiver to constantly be aware of your loved one's pain, as their pain may be invisible and unpredictable
- Fatigue affecting your ability to continuously empathize with your loved one
- A sense of hopelessness for both you and the person you are caring for, as chronic complex pain can present with no end in sight
- Experiences of sadness or guilt, grieving the loss of your loved one's “old self” and/or grieving the loss of your “old life” prior to caregiving

Knowing some of the challenges of this unique situation can help you to make sense of your feelings, experiences, and challenges.

(2) Identify your needs to prevent caregiver burnout

When the caregiver's own needs are not met, they may experience more frequent irritation, resentment, or increased fatigue. "Caregiver burnout" occurs when a family caregiver becomes physically and emotionally exhausted from caring for their family member or friend. Burnout among caregivers for those living with chronic pain is common and can show up as anxiety, sadness, and avoidance of social activities (Ojeda et al., 2014; Begona et al., 2014; Duena et al., 2016).

It is important to maintain your own health and well-being while caring for someone. It's helpful to learn more about the early warning signs of [caregiver burnout](#) so you can identify and address it. If you are starting to feel irritated or frustrated in your role as a caregiver, it is useful to identify areas where you experience challenges and could use support or fill a gap in your caregiving strategies. To identify and document your current needs as a caregiver, you may find it helpful to use this [Understanding Your Caregiver Needs worksheet](#). Examples of strategies to prevent burnout include setting realistic expectations, developing coping skills and asking for help before caregiving becomes overwhelming.

As the needs of your care recipient evolve, so will your own needs and boundaries. It is important to check in regularly with yourself to identify if new needs emerge or subside. If you are unsure of how you are coping, take this [caregiver resiliency questionnaire](#) to identify how you are managing your role as caregiver.

(3) Develop your support plan

After identifying your specific needs, you can create a plan to address these needs using the support available to you and preparing for potential setbacks. The [Caregiver Support Plan booklet](#) can help you do this. A support plan can benefit you and your loved one by clearly identifying your needs and what steps are needed to address them.

(4) Practice self-compassion

It's important for your health and well-being to be kind to yourself while providing care for someone else! Caregiving for someone living with pain is complex, and it is important to practice self-compassion. Self-compassion includes being understanding towards ourselves when we struggle or feel inadequate.

Remind yourself that no one is perfect, and that your loved one appreciates all the ways you're helpful, caring, and understanding. It makes a world of difference for your loved one to be connected to you. For more information on how to practice self-compassion, you can [watch this video on mindful self-compassion for caregivers.](#)

RESOURCES

- [Caregiver Support Line \(BC\): 1-877-520-3267](#)
- [Pain Support Line: 1-833-261-PAIN \(7246\)](#)
- [LivePlanBe](#)
- [Chronic Pain Hurts Everyone brochure](#)
- Caregiver Learning Center: familycaregiversbc.ca/caregiver-learning-center
- Family caregiver support groups: familycaregiversbc.ca/family-caregiver-support-groups
- Self-care for caregivers of people in pain: podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/self-care-for-caregivers-people-in-pain-wendy-johnstone/id1169792513?i=1000420671623
- Grief and loss: familycaregiversbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Illness-and-Grief...What-to-Expect.pdf
- Financial assistance guide - Family Caregivers of BC: familycaregiversbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Guide-to-Financial-Assistance-for-Caregivers.pdf
- Mindful Self-Compassion Webinar - familycaregiversbc.ca/archives/video/mindful-self-compassion
- Caregiver Support Plan Booklet - familycaregiversbc.ca/archives/3d-flip-book/caregiver-support-plan
- Caregiver Resiliency Questionnaire - familycaregiversbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Resilience-Strengths-Quiz2.pdf
- Understanding Your Needs Caregiver Worksheet - familycaregiversbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FCBC-Understanding-Caregiver-Needs.pdfj
- Preventing Caregiver Burnout - familycaregiversbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Preventing-Caregiver-Burnout.pdf

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**Family Caregivers
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INFORMATION TAKEN FROM:

Ojeda, Begoña, et al. "The impact of chronic pain: The perspective of patients, relatives, and caregivers. "*Families, Systems, & Health* 32.4 (2014): 399.

Radresa, Olivier, et al. "Current views on acute to chronic pain transition in post-traumatic patients: risk factors and potential for pre-emptive treatments. "*Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 76.4 (2014): 1142-1150.