

New Connections

HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 19



Caregiver Corner: Take a vacation for 30 minutes

If you're like most hands-on caregivers, you hear this all the time: "You've got to take a break. You're important, too, you know." And, "Don't forget to take care of yourself, too." Intellectually, you know that those who say these things are correct. But on the practical side, you may not know exactly how to take the breaks you need without falling down on your job as caregiver.

How to find the time

As is often said, "One does not *find* time. One *makes* time." And so it is with short respite breaks. To make the time, consider the typical day you have with the person you are caring for. Since many people with cancer need frequent rest and sleep periods, you can time your respite breaks to those periods. Or, perhaps the person you're caring for likes to watch a particular TV program each day at the same time. You can use that time to take your respite break.

Here is the key: Don't use those times to wash a few dishes, or put in a load of laundry, or make out a grocery list. It may be tempting to do those things because you know they need doing. However, those little tasks will always be there, no matter what. Your chance for a break may not. And as good as it feels to get things done, it feels even better in the long run to take a refreshing break.

Now, what should you do on your "vacation"?

The answer is simple: anything you want. As long as it meets your needs, breaks your tension, lessens your stress, relaxes you, boosts your energy, and renews your spirit. It doesn't have to be something that's good for you. Instead, it should be something you enjoy, something you look forward to – even if it's nibbling on a fine piece of chocolate!

Try to involve as many senses as you can in your respite break. For example, take a warm, fragrant bubble bath or practice easy yoga positions while playing classical music on the stereo and using an aroma machine.

Make it as simple as lying on the couch with the lights dimmed and listening to your favorite music.

Take a shower and focus your mind on how good it feels instead of how clean you'll be.

Enjoy a ritual such as making a cup of special tea with lovely china and a scone or massaging your hands and feet with an aromatic lotion.

Sit in a comfortable chair and read for 30 minutes from a novel you've been wanting to read.

In a prone position, perform tense and release exercises, beginning at your toes and working up to your jaw.

Sitting down with your legs crossed or lying on a bed or couch, practice deep breathing.

Sit down with a fashion or home-decorating magazine, or a political journal, or the sports page of the newspaper, and push out all thoughts about your function as a caregiver.

For a respite break to be worthwhile, it needs to be all about you and even indulgent. Anything that helps focus your mind on things other than the task before you can have a refreshing, therapeutic effect.

Just in case those nagging feelings of guilt begin to slip into your conscience, remember that your “vacation” is only partially for your benefit. Your loved one will reap a great deal of this benefit, too.

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National Home Office, 250 Williams Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-1002