

Managing Stress and Guilty Feelings

Have you ever found yourself thinking of things you “should,” “must,” or “ought” to do? Do you feel guilty for even taking the time for yourself to participate in this program? While caring for someone else, we might try to do it all, thinking, “I ought to be able to do this myself,” or “I shouldn’t have to ask for help.” We have high expectations and are our own toughest critic. As a result, it is very common to feel guilt, shame, or worthlessness.

Guilt stems from feelings that you are not doing enough, not saying enough, or not behaving in the “right” way. Some notice feelings of guilt around being “the healthy one.” You may feel “guilty” when you take time to care for yourself, or to focus on your needs. However, it is important to remember that you need support as well. **When you notice guilt:**

1. Ask yourself: do I truly believe that I am not doing a good enough job?
2. Think of what you would say to a friend if they were in your situation
3. Remind yourself that by taking time for yourself, you will be a better partner and caregiver to your loved one
4. Think of what a good friend might say to you
5. Ask yourself: Is it okay to ask for help? How can I get the help that I need?
6. Aim for flexibility in your thinking. Avoid words like “should,” “ought” and “must”
7. Remember that it is normal to feel this way
8. Try not to beat yourself up or be overly critical

Am I doing a good enough job?

Many people wonder whether they are doing a “good job” as a caregiver. Some worry that they will miss something about their loved one’s health, so they spend a lot of time checking in, asking questions, and searching for answers on the internet. While sometimes helpful, too much checking in, asking, and searching can make your stress and worry worse. **In these moments, consider the following:**

1. Remind yourself that you can trust the medical care team and direct your questions to them
2. Remind yourself that you are not a bother to the team, they care, and their job is to help
3. Ask yourself: am I doing the best that I can?
4. List some things that you are doing well
5. Try to limit time on the internet that may result in more questions

Strategies for managing stress and medical visits:

Caring for someone with cancer is more than a full-time job and can be stressful in addition to all your other responsibilities that, unfortunately, do not disappear. **There are a few things that you can do to stay organized:**

1. Take notes and keep them together in a folder or notebook
2. Summarize and compare notes with your loved one immediately after the appointment
3. Keep a running list of questions in between appointments
4. Bring another person with you to the appointment to be a listener and/or note-taker