

Taking Care of Your Loved Ones: A Matter of Solidarity

This influenza pandemic calls on all of us to show solidarity with one another. Many people will face a loved one's illness and will have to deal with the added task of being a caregiver.

It isn't easy! For a period of time, your life habits will be disrupted, your everyday life will have to be rearranged, and there will be new responsibilities on top of your usual tasks. You will have to deal with your own emotions such as stress, worry, fatigue, etc. For many, daily life is already a constant dash between daycare, school, work, a dependent parent or child, etc. How can you keep your equilibrium and health while taking care of your loved ones?



Taking care of your loved ones can be a positive experience despite the difficulties.

Benefits of Taking Care of a Sick Loved One

- Feeling useful and appreciated.
- Learning things about yourself, discovering your strengths, being proud of yourself.
- Learning about the other person.
- Gaining new knowledge and skills.
- Sharing special moments with the sick person and building a closer relationship with them.
- Learning to respect your limits, etc.

Possible Reactions

Taking care of a sick loved one means accepting that your normal life will be disrupted for a while

Some Reactions Can Be Unpleasant

- Worrying about your family's health.
- Worrying about your own health; worrying that there will be nobody to care for your children if you get sick.
- Feeling powerless, not feeling smart enough to care for the person: "I don't know what I'm supposed to do!"
- Feeling anger about having to postpone projects you had your heart set on.
- Seeing your own activities and recreation curtailed or completely put off.
- Feeling more tired than usual: "I have less energy, I have trouble bouncing back."
- Having trouble juggling work and family.
- Feeling tense, irritable, or less patient with your children or with the sick person.
- Refusing to let someone else help you: "I feel bad about asking for help. Anyway, I don't want to rely on someone else."
- Having more physical problems than usual, etc.

All of these reactions and emotions are possible, and are quite normal for any stressful situation that disrupts your everyday life. The influenza pandemic is an exceptional and temporary situation. It is a difficult time. Preparation, support, and solidarity are the winning attitudes for dealing with it.

How Can I Take Care of Others?

By preparing yourself! First, by recognizing the reactions and feelings you'll have about having the responsibility for caring for a sick loved one. Second, by preparing your own strategy – planning ways to lighten your burden, take care of yourself, and be aware of your limits.

Ways to Get Prepared and Get Organized

Get Informed

- Identify the organizations in your area that can help you if you need it, for example volunteers to help with transportation or cooking, meals on wheels, etc. Take down their phone numbers.
- Check with your employer about measures for a leave of absence or programs for home assistance or financial aid for illness in the family.
- Get reliable information about influenza by checking the Government of Québec pandemic website: www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca



Take Care of Yourself

- Keep good sleep habits. It's important to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day as much as possible. Long naps in the afternoon or evening can keep you from getting a good night's sleep.
- Give yourself time to rest during the day. When the person you're caring for is sleeping, why not take the opportunity to get some sleep yourself? A short (30-minute) nap can help recharge your batteries.
- Enjoy simple pleasures and moments of leisure like reading or a hot bath. Give yourself a treat, or let yourself do nothing.
- Keep in shape; practise a sport, dance, etc.
- Do activities that you like and that make you feel better; call a friend, do a puzzle, etc.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle such as a proper diet, etc.



Get Organized

- Talk to your loved ones and friends to work out ways to help one another when needed.
- Determine in advance what kind of help each person can give: for example, making meals in advance, going shopping, taking care of children, taking care of a sick person, etc.
- Identify at least two or three helpers in case one of them gets sick too.
- Make a list of your helpers' phone numbers so you can contact them quickly if needed.
- Create and maintain bonds of solidarity with your family, friends, and colleagues. You can exchange prevention tips or ways to reduce the workload.
- Make a list of the medication each family member takes.
- Keep enough cash on hand to deal with the family's needs for at least two weeks.
- If you need to take care of a loved one, organize your time properly by:
 - Making a list of your priorities in order of importance. Only do one thing at a time. When you feel more rested, take care of important things or things that have to get done.
 - Setting small, realistic, achievable goals. Reduce your expectations of yourself. **WARNING** for perfectionists and workaholics: Accept that you can't do everything and that nobody's perfect.
 - Asking for or accepting help. It's not a matter of pride or weakness on your part, but of taking responsibility for your own health.
 - Sharing responsibilities. Get each family member to do his or her part. For example, children can sweep, dry the dishes, etc.



When to Seek Help

- You feel overwhelmed by the situation and overcome by feelings of powerlessness, stress, etc.
- You're afraid of becoming aggressive toward the patient or your children.
- You don't have anyone you can count on in your family or social circle to take over for you.
- You refuse to rest or let someone else take over for you.
- You deny and ignore signs of fatigue.
- You feel exhausted even after a night's sleep.
- You have major difficulty concentrating or making minor decisions; you are making errors in judgment, etc.

Don't wait to be at the end of your rope before seeking help. Don't hesitate to encourage someone who needs help to seek it, either.

