



SUPPORT PARTNER TOOLKIT

TIPS FOR CARING FOR YOURSELF
WHILE CARING FOR A LOVED ONE

**CAN
DO**
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHILE CARING FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE

Self-care isn't selfish – it's self-sustaining and essential. You need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping the other person.

You aren't alone – information, support, tools, and resources are available.

Pay as close attention to your own physical and emotional cues as you do to your partner's. Look for red flags that you may be maxed out, exhausted, or overwhelmed.

YOUR WELLNESS MATTERS



Build time into your week for the recommended 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise along with 2-3 sessions of resistance training. These activities can be done in small chunks throughout your day.

Be sure to make time for yearly visits to your primary care provider for wellness checks and preventive screenings.

Learn from a physical therapist (PT) how to provide hands-on care for your loved one while protecting your neck, back, and joints.

Try to take time for yourself – to think, enjoy a hobby, see a friend, read a book. These activities are important for your emotional well-being

Depression and anxiety are common in support partners. If you feel lost, down, or unusually stressed, talk to your healthcare provider, join a Can Do program, call an MS Navigator at the National MS Society (1-800-344-4867), join a support group.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR PARTNERSHIP



Acknowledge your own current and potential losses as well as your partner's.

Remember that the MS symptoms you see are just the tip of the iceberg. Overwhelming fatigue, changes in thinking and memory, pain and other sensory problems are common in MS.

Make communication a priority – making time to listen as well as talk.

Accept that things take longer than they used to, and plan for it.

It's OK to ask your partner to use a mobility aid for some things, so that you can share more activities, go at a reasonable pace, and worry less about his or her safety.

Don't jump to conclusions about what your partner needs or doesn't need – ask!

Think carefully before giving up all the activities you can no longer share; this kind of sacrifice typically ends up feeling bad for both of you.

Don't just worry about the unpredictable future – plan for it.

If you find yourself talking or behaving in ways you wouldn't want the neighbors to see, it doesn't make you a bad person or bad care partner. It just means it's time to reach out for support and assistance.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING COMFORTABLY AND EFFECTIVELY

Listen with intent: make eye contact, confirm what you've heard, don't interrupt, and allow your partner time and space to respond.

Speak with intent: slow your pace, if necessary, confirm that you've been understood, avoid accusations and blame by using "I statements" (I think...I wish...I would like to ask...).

Assume positive intent until shown otherwise. Just because you don't like what you're hearing doesn't mean you need to shut down or turn off.

If you need time to think, formulate a response, or cool down, say so – and commit to coming back to the conversation in a reasonable period of time.

A mental health professional can help you jumpstart a difficult conversation by providing a safe and comfortable setting for sharing feelings and thoughts.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Can Do Multiple Sclerosis
CanDo-MS.org

Support is a Two-Way Street - Article

Support Partner Voices – Can Do MS Podcast

Embracing Carers - Videos

HELPFUL RESOURCES

National MS Society



A Guide For Support Partners - Brochure

Going The Extra Mile - Article

What Is MS? - Website

Understanding MS FAQ's - Website

What is MS? - Video

MS and Carepartnership: Tips and Inspiration - Video

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CANDO-MS.ORG