



# I am a Caregiver

Getting Started Toolkit



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**There are an estimated 3.3 million caregivers, just like you, who provide physical or mental health support to a family member, partner, friend and/or neighbour.**

Many people don't consider themselves a caregiver. Instead, they are family member or friend, doing what needs to be done. While caregivers say they want to provide care, many are overwhelmed and find it difficult to get the information and support they need. According to the 2019 Spotlight Report, a third (31%) of Ontario caregivers say they are not coping well emotionally and are worried about their own mental health. For caregivers supporting someone with a mental health challenge, the number increases to more than half (57%). Many caregivers are struggling to cope and experiencing increased levels of stress, frustration and even depression. Caregivers need support themselves.

The *I am a Caregiver* toolkit includes important information for the new or seasoned caregiver. This information was created by caregivers, for caregivers. This toolkit focuses on how to take care of yourself. The Ontario Caregiver website also includes a number of tip sheets on topics such as: communicating with health care providers, privacy and consent and many more. Throughout your caregiving journey, you may need support finding local programs or information that can help you. In those times, The Ontario Caregiver Organization's 24/7 Caregiver Helpline is here to help.

### **The Ontario Caregiver Helpline**

The Ontario Caregiver Helpline is answered by community resource specialists who have been trained by caregivers, on the unique needs of caregivers. They are a one-stop resource for information and support. Whether you are looking for respite care in your area, a support group or financial information, the helpline is here to connect you to existing services. The Caregiver Helpline is available to all caregivers – regardless of age, diagnosis or where they live. It provides 24/7 support because caregiving is not a 9-5 job. The Caregiver Helpline is 1 833 416 2273. The Live Chat is also available 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Mon – Fri). You can also search for resources on our website [www.ontariocaregiver.ca](http://www.ontariocaregiver.ca).

### **Identifying Your Needs**

It's ok to ask for help. Start by taking a few minutes to reflect on your role and the many tasks you manage.

## Step 1: Build Your Support Team

Build a support team around you. This could mean asking family members or friends for help or looking to a professional service that can help you now and/or in the future. Take an inventory of the tasks you manage and the resources you currently use. This exercise will give you a better picture of your responsibilities and where you may need extra help. If you are looking for a local service, contact the Caregiver Helpline at 1 833 416 2273 or visit [ontariocaregiver.ca](http://ontariocaregiver.ca)

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>I perform this task</b>	<b>Who can help?</b>	<b>When/How often is this done?</b>
<b>Personal Care</b>	Bathing			
	Dressing			
	Eating/Feeding			
	Foot / mouth care			
	Toileting			
	Lifting / transferring			
	Grooming (shaving, hair care)			
	Medication management			
	Exercise			
	Regular treatment regimes			
<b>Help Around the House</b>	Housekeeping			
	Laundry			
	Meal Planning			
	Meal Preparation			
	Gardening / snow shovelling			
	Care for pets and or plants			
	Check mail			
	Sort recycling/waster disposal			
<b>Transportation/ Shopping</b>	Drive care recipient to activities / appointments			
	Drive family/friend to activities/social appointments			
	Take family/friend shopping			
	Fill prescriptions			
	Car maintenance			
	Coordinating care			
<b>Pscho-Social Support</b>	Check in by phone			
	In-person visits			
	Leisure activities			
<b>Financial/Legal Affairs</b>	Banking, pay bills			
	Legal documents			
	Income Taxes			
<b>Other</b>				

## Step 2: Reflect on Your Needs

This quiz will help you to reflect on how you're feeling and think about the level of stress in your life. Think about your quiz score and what you need to support your own physical and mental health. Do you need a break, assistance with transportation, someone to talk to, or are you a young caregiver who isn't sure where to turn? If you are looking for a local peer support group, contact the Caregiver Helpline at 1 833 416 2273 or visit [ontariocaregiver.ca](http://ontariocaregiver.ca)

This quiz is meant as a guide and should not be used in place of advice from your doctor or healthcare professional. Your score will change depending on when you take this quiz and where you are in your caregiving journey. Please check back from time to time to see how you are doing.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
<b>I find it difficult to balance work, family and caregiving responsibilities</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I have conflicts with my friends, family members or care recipient</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I worry that I'm not doing a good job as a caregiver</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I feel guilty</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I feel anxious</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I feel sad and cry</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I have problems with sleep</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I experience chronic neck or back pain</b>	0	1	2	3
<b>I have tension headaches</b>	0	1	2	3

### Your Score

- 0-10 You are probably managing well. Remember that it's still important to think about ways of preventing stress from building up.
- 11-15 You may need to seek out some additional support. Try to identify the things that are causing you stress - you may not be able to change all of them but there may be areas where you can ask for help or make changes to relieve some of your stress.
- 16-19 You may be experiencing caregiver distress and your responsibilities may already be taking a toll on your physical and emotional well-being. It is important that you talk to your doctor or healthcare professional, a family member, friend, or join a support group to help reduce your level of distress.
- 20+ You may be experiencing caregiver burnout. To protect your physical and mental health, it is important that you talk to your family doctor or healthcare professional about your stress. You may also want to talk with family or friends or join a support group.

Consider the tasks you manage, as well as your quiz score.

For information about how to find supports in your community, visit the Find Support page on our website.

*This quiz has been re-printed with permission from Caregivers Nova Scotia.*

## Step 3: Attend to your own needs and add self-care to your routine

Caregiver burn-out is real and it's on the rise. If you are experiencing any of the following, please speak to your doctor or another member of your healthcare team.

- **Exhaustion and lack of energy**
- **Feelings of guilt and being overwhelmed**
- **Feeling anxious or unwell**
- **Neglect own needs because life is dominated by caregiving**
- **Difficulty relaxing even when help is available**
- **Impatience and irritability**
- **Changes in sleeping and eating patterns and/or excessive use of alcohol, cannabis, and/or prescription medications**
- **Unable or unwilling to ask for help**

The most important self-care strategy is reaching out for help. The Ontario Caregiver Helpline provides caregivers with a one-stop resource for information and support. Whether you're looking for respite care in your area, a support group, information about financial support, the helpline is here to connect you to resources you need.

**Caregiver Helpline**  
**1 833 416 2273**

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