

NAVIGATING EVERYDAY LIFE WITH  
AN AUTOIMMUNE CONDITION

# Support That Brings Patients and Caregivers Together

A guide for those caring for  
a loved one living with an  
autoimmune disease





### *Support that makes a difference.*

You may not think of yourself as a caregiver, but anyone can be one. A caregiver is someone who's there for a loved one, providing emotional care and practical help in their time of need. A caregiver may have many roles, and those roles will evolve as your loved one's needs change over time.

As a caregiver, you may have noticed your loved one going through a wide range of emotions. While this can be difficult for both of you, your willingness to listen and offer support can make a big difference.

## Types of Support You Can Provide

### EMOTIONAL

Try to listen to problems and offer support as your loved one makes decisions. This could also be an opportunity for you to strengthen your relationship.

### PRACTICAL

Taking care of small, everyday tasks can help your loved one in a big way. Certain jobs may be great to share with others who want to help.

## Tips for Offering Emotional Support

Being present for someone diagnosed with an autoimmune disease requires thought, care, and empathy. Below are a few ideas that may help.

### LISTEN

Sometimes all your loved one needs is someone to listen and hear what they're going through.

### EDUCATE YOURSELF

Learn as much as you can about the specific autoimmune condition your loved one has. Understanding the disease, its symptoms, and treatment options will help you provide better care.

### SEEK SUPPORT GROUPS

Join support groups for caregivers of people with autoimmune diseases. These groups can provide valuable advice, emotional support, and a sense of community.

### COMMUNICATE THOUGHTFULLY

Remember that people communicate in different ways. Respect your loved one's need to share or remain quiet. They may also want to talk to another person about some of the challenges they may be facing.

### ASK HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR LOVED ONE

Everyone needs different kinds of help and emotional care. Ask what you can do for your loved one. They may have unique ideas and needs.

### SPEAK FROM YOUR HEART

It won't always be easy to find the words to say. But it's important that you and your loved one have open communication.

### TAKE TIME TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

Remember that problems can't always be solved with one conversation. Many concerns and questions can come up along the way, and conversations may get complicated.

### BE GENEROUS WITH GESTURES

When words fail, a heartfelt gesture can make all the difference. Giving a hug and a shoulder to lean on can sometimes be more comforting than anything you say.

## Tips for Offering Practical Support

Concentrating on things that are out of your control may leave you feeling helpless. Instead, focusing on the specific things you can do to help your loved one.

### HELP WITH DAILY TASKS

There are lots of small tasks you can take on to help your loved one. Here are a few ways you could help:

- Shop for necessities, like groceries and household supplies
- Help with household chores
- Organize paperwork, like bills and insurance forms





## Remember to Care for Yourself

To be a good caregiver, you must first care for yourself. Consider the tips below to help you find a better balance.

### SET ASIDE SOME TIME FOR YOURSELF DAILY

Maybe it's the peace and quiet of reading a book, the fresh air you breathe while taking a walk, or the enjoyment you get from seeing a movie. Whatever it is, take time to recharge so you have the energy to take better care of your loved one.

### ASK TO ADJUST YOUR WORK SCHEDULE

If you need to dedicate more time to your caregiving responsibilities, your employer may be able to adjust your schedule or workload. Ask if your company has a family leave, elder care, or other employee benefit policy that can help.

### PLAN HEALTHY MEALS

A little planning can go a long way when it comes to eating a healthy diet, so try to prepare meals in advance. When you and your loved one are headed to a long day of appointments, it may help to pack a sandwich, a salad, or snacks to keep your energy up.

### STAY ACTIVE

Any kind of exercise can help you stay healthy. Walking, swimming, and bicycling are all good options. Choose something that works for you. Even gardening or cleaning count; just find 15 to 30 minutes a day to be active.

### GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

If you're having trouble sleeping through the night, short naps may help you rest. At night, try breathing exercises or soft music to help you fall asleep. If you're still struggling to get the sleep you need, your doctor may be able to help.

### DON'T BE AFRAID TO DELEGATE

When you feel overwhelmed, ask family, friends, neighbors, and even coworkers for help. Some people may say no, and that's okay. But many will say yes, again and again. Good tasks to delegate are those that take time but don't require specialized skills,, such as laundry or grocery shopping.

### TALK TO OTHER CAREGIVERS

It may feel like you're the only one in the world facing these challenges, but you're not alone. Through local support groups, you can connect with other people who share the same feelings and are experiencing similar struggles.





## Additional Resources

**National Alopecia Foundation:** Connects the alopecia areata community, including patients, family members, healthcare providers, and researchers through its support programs, email newsletters, website, research summits, and annual patient conference. <https://www.naaf.org>

**Autoimmune Association:** Offers resources and support for caregivers, including tips on managing caregiving responsibilities and maintaining healthy boundaries. <https://autoimmune.org>

**National Alliance for Caregiving:** Provides information and support services for caregivers, including respite care and counseling. <https://www.caregiving.org>



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**Navigating everyday life with an autoimmune condition is possible.**

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