

10 Practical Tips *from* Highly Effective Caregivers

1. **Take time for yourself.** Schedule some quiet time away from cancer, cancer, cancer. Practice blocking out worry, even for 10 minutes. Sit or walk in a special location, imagining a sign that says, “No worry allowed.” This is your “worry-free” appointment with yourself.
2. **Create some distractions,** such as working with puzzles, crosswords, computer games, knitting, cards, music or yoga. Activities that have a rhythmic mechanical repetition are helpful and soothing.
3. **Create a support system.** Find someone who will serve as your cheerleader and your encourager. Someone who will lean over the balcony, waving his/her arms as you run the race below in the arena, shouting, “You can do this. Keep pressing forward. Easy does it. First things first. You are stronger than you think.”
4. **Cry and laugh.** These are all-natural stress-buster activities. Find something to laugh about every day. It reduces stress, increases the heart rate and muscle activity, and releases feel-good chemicals into 22 M. D. Anderson Cancer Center the brain. Even a smile can produce a moment of pleasure. Sometimes a good cry can discharge stress and bring relief.
5. **Open up your horizon a bit.** Caregiving can create a narrow, lonely and shrinking world. Talk to someone at least once a day about anything other than cancer. Step outside and just look at the sky, even for a minute. Pray.
6. **Learn to walk in beauty.** Take notice of our natural world and the miracles of sunlight, fluttering leaves, bright flowers, floating clouds, a squirrel skirting across the grass, rain, thunder, a gentle breeze, morning dew, fountain sprays, the rhythm and rotation of daylight and darkness with the promise of a new sunrise every morning.
7. **As you walk, imagine energy and light traveling from your feet up into your mind,** with each step visualizing its slow and healing course of travel through your legs, abdomen, torso, shoulders and arms. Breathe in peace deeply and breathe out distress, counting to five each time. Imagine opening your heart and releasing musical notes, filling the air around you as you exhale. Practice. Caregivers — Facing the Challenge Together 23
8. **Keep a journal of “Tiny Gratitudes.”** Gratitude is the number one positive emotion. Remember that life’s greatest gifts sometimes arrive in small packages. Miracles really are everywhere when we look for them. Become a detective and look for and find the little things — the tiniest moment of beauty, the tiniest blessing, the tiniest thing for which to be grateful. Count your pulse or that of your loved one ... and be grateful.
9. **Use positive self-talk.** “I can cope. I am being held up by God. I can do this. Others have done it before me and I can do it, too. I’ve been through tough times before.”
10. **Join a support group.** You don’t have to go through this alone. It will help you organize the chaos in your head, sort through your feelings, and direct your goals and behaviors in ways you may not have considered.