

Taking care of yourself while a family member is in the hospital

Whenever a loved one has to stay in the hospital it is stressful for family members. In order to help support your loved one, you need to take care of yourself. Here are some tips from other families that have been there.

Allow your feelings

You may have all kinds of feelings. Accept your feelings. Some days you may feel hopeful. Other days you may feel worried or overwhelmed. You may feel like you are on an emotional rollercoaster. This is normal.

Take frequent breaks.

It is important that you take breaks. Go to the cafeteria. Get a cup of coffee at Coffee Central. Check out the MGH General Store. Find the chapel if you need a quiet place. Take a walk.

Take care of the essentials.

You need to be getting enough sleep. Make sure you are eating consistently. Also take breaks to go home and shower and change.

Let other people help you.

Family, friends, and neighbors may offer to help. Even if you are not used to asking for help, let others know what you need. Perhaps people can help with household tasks, childcare, cooking a meal or shopping for you. This will be good for you and for those who want to be supportive.

You need emotional support too.

This is not a time to be isolated from your own friends. Stay in touch by phone. Have a friend come to the hospital to take you to lunch or for a cup of coffee/tea. It is important for you to have people you can talk to.

It is okay to have moments of fun.

You might feel guilty if you enjoy yourself while a loved one is in the hospital. Just remember laughter is one of the best stress reducers.

Decide how you want to share information.

Many friends and family may call. Repeated phone calls and questions can feel overwhelming. Take charge of how you want to communicate information.

- Screen your phone calls. Don't feel like you have to talk to everyone.
- Choose a spokesperson. This person can return phone calls or call family and friends with updates.
- Leave an update message on your voice mail or telephone answering machine.
- Use technology to help you be in touch with family and friends. You can use email to send a group message with an update. Other helpful sites on the Internet are:
www.caring.org : Caring pages is a web based program the hospital uses.
www.lotsahelpinghands.com is another site that can be helpful for organizing help from friends and family.

Where can I get more information or help? Ask to speak to a clinical social worker. Call 617-726-2640.