

Fact Sheet - For Family and Friends: How Can I Help?

What Can I Do?

It is often difficult for family and friends to know what to do to help a patient with pancreatic disease. Keep in mind that as every patient is different, there is no one right answer.

Try to anticipate what the patient will need and make specific offers rather than making a vague offer (i.e. "let me know if I can help in any way"). Be realistic about what you are able to do, and keep the promises you've made.

The possible ways to help are endless, but here are a few examples:

- If, for instance, you know that the patient is feeling particularly nauseous on a given day, offering to bring over dinner for the rest of the family might be a tremendous help.
- The patient may need help getting to a healthcare appointment, and you could volunteer to accompany them. Often, it is a good idea to have two people listening to the healthcare provider, as in stressful times, it can be hard for the patient to remember exactly what a provider says.
- If the patient has children, you could help by watching the kids for an hour one afternoon so that the patient could take a nap.
- Patients often appreciate a simple visit to help distract them for a few hours. You can do things together like listen to music, look at photos, or watch a movie. Sometimes just having some company is a real help.
- Sometimes simply spending time on the phone with the patient and allowing them to vent provides a huge amount of relief.

What Can I Say?

It is often very hard to know the right things to say to someone who is suffering from a chronic illness, and when to say them. This uncertainty can cause family and friends to withdraw and distance themselves, leaving the patient feeling abandoned at a time when he/she most needs support.

Basically, you should let the patient know that you are available to listen, but let them control when and how much they wish to share. When a patient indicates that they simply want to talk about what they are going through, the best thing you can do is to allow time to listen. But be aware that there will be times when a patient doesn't want to talk about it at all, and instead just needs to have a friend around.

You may also want to share your own thoughts and feelings with them. Don't forget that sometimes it is the unsaid things that say the most!

The Caregiver

The job of the caregiver can be very stressful. If possible, try to share the work. Identify as many family members and friends that are willing to help, and work out a schedule. If you need more assistance at home than is available, ask your doctor to refer you to a social worker who can try to arrange homecare services.

Do's and Don'ts

1. *DO* acknowledge the person's suffering.
 2. *DO* offer assistance. Ask what you can do to help; make a phone call, run an errand. Visit on the worst days, encourage on the better days!
 3. *DO* treat the person with respect.
 4. *DO* remember the old golden rule: Think about how you would need to be supported should the situation be in reverse!
 5. *LIVE, LOVE, SHARE, LAUGH* and **BE: TOGETHER**. (All the time, partner!)
1. *DO NOT* judge the person! Pain is not a sign of weakness or bad character.
 2. *DO NOT* pretend that you don't notice the struggle. Sometimes the forest is truly through the trees.
 3. *DO NOT dwell* on the future. High pain levels force the person to live in the present, so make the present pleasant. Be upbeat!
 4. *DO NOT* dwell on other problems. Allow time for togetherness, conversation, movies, and light topics. There is always good of some sort going on.

Remember, compassion means a lot - maybe more than you think!



This fact sheet is provided courtesy of the National Pancreas Foundation. To learn more about our organization, please visit our website at www.pancreasfoundation.org.

