



American
Heart
Association.

ANSWERS
by heart



Lifestyle + Risk Reduction
Caregiving

How Can I Support My Loved One?

Someone close to you has just had a heart attack, stroke or heart procedure. To help you and your loved one handle your feelings, it's good to be aware of them and to share them with people you trust. Talk with family members, friends, people where you worship and your health care professionals.

You and your loved one may also benefit from joining a support group for patients and their families. Support groups can help you both:

- Realize you're not alone
- Learn about additional coping skills
- Talk openly about your feelings
- Improve your understanding of a condition and how to manage it
- Reduce your stress and anxiety



How can I help?

If you're caring for someone at home, you can help your loved one with a variety of activities.

- Learn to communicate well with your loved one's health care team. Ask questions and talk about any concerns.
- Help the person with daily tasks, such as bathing, eating or managing their medication.
- Learn to cook foods for your loved one that are low in saturated fat, sodium and added sugars.
- Encourage healthy lifestyle changes. It's easier — and more fun — for your loved one to make changes if you're making changes at the same time.
- Find a physical activity you both enjoy and do it together.
- Help your loved one stop smoking. If you smoke, make a plan to quit together.
- Drive the person to their medical appointments.
- Run errands for them, such as grocery shopping or picking up medications.

- Praise your loved one for progress in their recovery.
- Take a CPR class and learn the warning signs of heart attack and stroke.
- Make sure important medical, insurance, legal and financial documents are organized and easy to find.

What could change and how can I deal with it?

As you take on a caregiving role, you may have less time to yourself. One of the most important things you can do for yourself and your loved one is to make time and space for yourself. Caregiving can be hard, so find time to take a break, rest and get some sleep.

If you are a caregiver to your spouse or partner, you or your partner may be a little anxious about sex. It's important to talk openly about your feelings with each other. Avoid rushing into sex to prove things are "back to normal." Take your time and ease back into sexual activity.

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How might I feel and what can I do?

- **Guilty.** You may feel you could have done something to prevent what happened. Instead, try thinking about making healthy changes instead of reflecting on the past.
- **Afraid.** You may be afraid that the life you had planned together will change. Talk to your loved one about your fears.
- **Overwhelmed.** The suddenness of stroke and some heart conditions often allows no time to adjust to the shifting roles. Ask for help! Friends, relatives and neighbors will be happy to help.
- **Depressed.** It's common to feel sad and anxious at a time like this. You may have trouble sleeping, have less energy or feel ill. These feelings should go away as things improve.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Where can I take a CPR class?

What can I do to help with rehabilitation?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.