

Taking care of yourself

When supporting a friend or loved one through recovery, it's important to make sure you're taking care of yourself too.



The value of supporting someone through recovery

Whether you're stopping in from time to time or present daily, helping take care of someone in recovery can make a significant difference.

People in treatment and recovery are much more likely to achieve sobriety when they have a strong support system. Knowing people care about them and are there emotionally and practically can motivate them. It can help them feel more optimistic and encouraged while providing a sense of accountability. And taking on some of their day-to-day tasks (like cooking meals or cleaning) offers stress relief and helps them focus on recovery.

But at the same time, as someone close to them, you need to take care of yourself too. How you show support, how often and to what extent should be balanced with your own needs. Here are some self-care considerations.



Take care of yourself

It's crucial to keep yourself healthy, especially if you want to be there for the people you love. That means covering the basics, like eating nutritious food, getting enough quality sleep, taking time to relax and keeping active. It also means doing things you enjoy and taking breaks when you need them.

If you don't prioritise your own health and wellbeing, you risk chronic stress and burnout which can lead to anxiety, depression and other serious mental health conditions. You also risk developing or worsening physical conditions.

Depending on the situation, you may drop in from time to time or share a living space with your loved one in recovery. From how much time you can give to what you can afford and the limits of your own emotional and physical capacity, let them know what you can and can't do in terms of providing support. And stick to it.



Be prepared for the journey

Recovery takes time and follows different paths based on the individual's unique needs and preferences. Changing behaviour is hard for everyone, regardless of their circumstances. What works well for one person may not work for another. Some people respond well to talk therapy and abstinence, while others benefit greatly from integrating medication for addiction use disorder or medication for opioid use disorder into their treatment plan.

Studies show that more than half of people who ask for help and get it have a better quality of life after three months. But keep in mind that many people attempt recovery more than once before they achieve long-term success. Relapsing is not a sign of weakness or failure. It's just a difficult part of the recovery that some people experience.

So, do your best to be patient, set your expectations accordingly and stay hopeful. If your loved one does relapse, encourage them to try again.

Important: Also, be sure to celebrate the wins along the way.



Accept your feelings

It's natural to feel a spectrum of emotions when you're trying to help someone you care about recover from addiction. Sometimes you might feel disappointed, angry and frustrated. Other times you may feel quite the opposite. Just as your loved one is on a journey, so are you. Be kind to yourself and show yourself compassion.

If you do begin to feel negative emotions, practise self-care, such as breathing deeply, counting to 10, or closing your eyes for a few moments. If the feelings persist, consider whether something more is going on, such as chronic stress or burnout. It's OK to take a break. Reach out to friends and family who can step in and give you some time off. Let the person you're caring for know that you need some time to take care of yourself and when you'll be available again to help them.



Find support

As you go on the recovery journey with your loved one, it's important to tap into support systems for yourself too. Get in touch with other people you know who've been in a similar situation and can relate to what you're going through. Consider joining a support group for family and friends of people in recovery. Talk to a therapist or counsellor who can guide you through the journey and help you find your centre.

If you don't know where to start, search online for support systems in your area and virtual ones. From helplines to chatrooms, group meetings and educational materials, many organisations, services and resources exist in communities around the world.

Sources

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Mind. [Helping someone with drug and alcohol problems](#). June 2022.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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