



How to Aid a Sick Family Member

Expert
Reviewed

Four Methods: [Providing Comfort and Support](#) [Aiding Someone with a Chronic Illness](#) [Supporting a Family Member Suffering from Mental Illness](#)
[Practicing Self-Care](#)

When someone you love falls ill they can lose all their energy, fall prey to pain, and become down and/or exhausted. However, this discomfort can be eased by the loving care of a supportive family member like yourself. Ensure that your loved ones are comfortable and cared for throughout the duration of their illness.

Method
1

Providing Comfort and Support

- 1 Find out what kind of illness they have, and research it.** Understand the symptoms so that you can monitor the illness and determine if your relative is getting better or worse. Certain illnesses can be aided by home remedies, over the counter medicines, and simple treatments. Other, more serious illnesses, will require professional medical help.
- 2 Give your relative medicine to help fight their illness.** If they've been prescribed a certain medicine from the doctor, make sure they get it on time. If they are taking over the counter painkillers or medication to ease cold and flu symptoms, make sure you ask them regularly whether they feel like they need another dose. Carefully read the information provided with the medication to make sure that they are taking the medicine properly. Some medications need to be taken with food and drink. Ensure that all directions are followed. Do not exceed the daily dosage limit. Common types of over the counter medication to consider are: ^[1]
 - Antihistamines
 - Decongestants
 - Cough medicine
- 3 Stay near them and help out as much as possible.** If the relative is frequently throwing up or suffering fits, make sure you stay near them to provide support and comfort. Hold them steady, comfort them, and help them clean up any mess that may result from the sickness.
- 4 Provide them with blankets and pillows.** Rest is a very important aspect of recovery for many illnesses. Make sure that your relative is comfortable and in a relaxed environment suitable for getting lots of rest. Blankets, comfy pillows, and a bed will help your relative get the added rest they need on the road to recovery.
 - Creating a separate sick room is also a good idea if the illness is contagious. This will give your relative some privacy and create a quiet space while at the same time protecting the rest of the family from unwanted germs. ^[2]
- 5 Make sure they have tissues and a garbage near by.** Many common illnesses cause nasal congestion and/or vomiting. Your relative will be much more comfortable with tissues, water, and a trash can within reach. This way they can easily blow their nose or vomit without having to get up and move around.
- 6 Keep them entertained.** Being sick in bed all day can be very boring, so help them find things to enjoy. Read to them, settle them near the TV or talk to them for a while. Chances are, the less bored they are, the less down in the dumps they'll feel.
- 7 Give them lots of clear fluids.** Fluid loss can lead to dehydration and is common for people with cold and flu symptoms. Water is the best choice. Keeping your relative well hydrated means their body is better equipped to battle their illness. Signs of dehydration include: ^[3]
 - Less than normal amounts of urine.

- Dry mouth and/or eyes
- Dry skin that doesn't easily go back to normal after being pinched.
- Blood in the stool or blood in the vomit.

8 Make sure they only eat light food. Light foods are easier on the digestive system and some can help to aid with hydration.

- Popsicles, yogurt, toast, crackers, and broth-based soups are excellent choices.

9 Try Ginger. Ginger has long been associated with alternative medicinal treatments. Ginger root, best consumed as a tea when sick, can help treat nausea and other digestive issues. ^[4]

- Give your relative flat ginger ale or ginger tea in order to reduce the nausea associated with the flu, chemotherapy, or pregnancy-related "morning" sickness. ^[5]

10 Avoid sweets and fatty foods. Research shows that sweets can actually suppress the immune system and cause inflammation. ^[6] In a similar way, fatty foods are harder to digest and may cause stomach pains and cramping. ^[7] Specific foods to avoid include:

- Red meats
- Fried foods
- Soda
- Candy

Method 2

Aiding Someone with a Chronic Illness

1 Be present. When a family member is diagnosed with a chronic illness such as arthritis, diabetes, or multiple sclerosis they may begin to suffer from depression. It is very important you are present and supportive. Chronic illnesses are not curable, and although there are treatments to help manage the symptoms, individuals diagnosed with a chronic illness can often feel hopeless. Depression is one of the leading complications associated with chronic illness. ^[8]

- You may also want to look into providing your relative with a social network or support group to help them stay connected with others and avoid the feeling of isolation.

2 Learn about their condition. It is very important that you learn as much as possible about their condition because this will help you provide treatment, manage pain, and understand what they are experiencing. ^[9]

- For example, if your loved one has been diagnosed with diabetes you will want to have a thorough understanding of what foods they can eat and how to administer any medications, such as insulin.

3 Provide support. People suffering from chronic illness often have a team of medical health care professionals including doctors, nurses, and counsellors. The best way that you can be supportive is by working with the health care professionals to administer medications and provide emotional support. Try and allow your relative to maintain a normal life as much as possible. If there were activities they enjoyed prior to their illness try and allow them to continue to engage in these activities. You will not be able to cure their illness, but you can greatly improve their quality of life. ^[10]

4 Be aware of changing needs. As their illness progresses or changes they may need different forms of treatment. For example, they may require medical aids and new equipment, nursing care, or other forms of assistance. Monitor their symptoms and comfort level to ensure that they are being cared for in the best possible way. Speak with their doctors and health care professionals whenever you notice a change in their symptoms and behaviour. ^[11]

Method
3**Supporting a Family Member Suffering from Mental Illness**

1 Talk with your family member about their condition. If you notice a family member may be suffering from a mental health illness or they have recently been diagnosed, it is important to talk openly with them about their health. Mental illness is something we don't talk about enough in our society. The best way to show your relative support is by talking openly and positively about mental illness. Some tips for talking about mental illness include: ^[12]

- Communicate in a direct and clear manner. For example, you might say "I have been worried about you lately. Is there anything I can do to help?"
- Use language that is appropriate to the age and developmental level of your relative. If you are speaking with a child don't provide too many details.
- Discuss mental illness in a place where your family member feels safe and comfortable.
- Be aware of their reactions and slow down if they seem overwhelmed or confused during the conversation.

2 Assist in finding professional help. Some mental illnesses will require professional therapy. It is important to know that in some instances you will not be able to help your relative overcome their mental health issues. Your relative may feel more comfortable discussing their mental health issues with someone they don't know, like a therapist or support group. In these circumstances it is important that you are supportive and encourage them to seek out a professional therapist. ^[13]

- You may say "I know you have been struggling lately and you may not be comfortable talking to me about your condition. That is okay. Can I assist you in finding someone to talk to?"

3 Educate yourself about their mental illness. By knowing the details of the specific illness you can provide better care and support. Not understanding the illness and symptoms may lead to misconceptions and will impact your ability to give adequate care. ^[14]

- For example, you are more likely to understand and sympathize with the suicidal thoughts of a loved one suffering from depression if you are educated about depression.

4 Allow your loved one to have some control. Often when an individual is suffering from a mental illness they feel as though they have lost control over their life and they struggle with self esteem. You can help them feel in control again by allowing them to take part in decision making. ^[15]

- For example, if your loved one decides to wear an outfit that doesn't match don't criticize them. This is not a major decision and by letting them choose their own clothing they will feel some sense of normalcy.

5 Be calm and supportive. At times caring for a loved one with mental health issues can be frustrating and exhausting. It is important to remain calm and positive even during stressful periods. Remember that they also feel frustrated and likely have less control over their actions. Try and avoid responding to your loved one in an angry manner.

- For example, if your loved one is aggressive or violent you may respond by saying "I understand you are frustrated, but we do not allow violence in our household."

Method
4**Practicing Self-Care**

1 Make time for yourself. Caring for a loved one can take up a lot of time and energy. Schedule time to rest, have fun, and get away this will allow you to return to your loved one refreshed and in a positive mental state. ^[16]

2 Ask for assistance. At times you may find it too difficult to be the sole caregiver of a sick family member. You can find assistance in a number of places:

- Ask another family member to pitch in and help out.
- Look into hiring a nurse or other health care professional to assist with home care.
- Find a service that will deliver meals. This will enable you to focus more specifically on emotional support.

- Seek out a support group. Depending on your relative's illness you may be feeling emotionally and mentally exhausted from providing constant care. A support group will help you meet and talk with other people who are dealing with similar situations.

3 Be physically active. One of the best ways to protect your mental health during times of crisis is by looking after your physical health. Try and find a way to exercise daily. This does not have to be strenuous exercise, and includes anything from taking the stairs when possible to joining a group exercise class. This will help alleviate the stress associated with your relative's illness while keeping your body healthy. ^[17]

4 Avoid drugs and alcohol. Some people will turn to drugs and alcohol during periods of stress. They do not actually help relieve stress and often times can worsen feelings of anxiety or stress. It is best to turn to other family members or friends when you are feeling overwhelmed. ^[18]

5 Talk with your employer about sick leave. Some employers will allow for paid sick leave which can include caring for a seriously ill family member. Check with your employer to see what your benefits are. This will help give you both the time and financial assistance necessary to look after your ailing relative. Individual benefits will vary, but it is a good idea to speak with your employer about this type of financial assistance. ^[19]

Community Q&A

How can I make my mom feel better?

Shari Forschen,
N.P.

Understand the reason that she is ill and what treatments can help. Learn about the illness. Learn about the realistic prognosis and understand what can help and what is not going to make a difference. Helping loved one come to terms with the trajectory of illness can help both of you come to terms with the situation.

Flag as duplicate

Not Helpful 1 Helpful 1

Chat with this expert

Can you answer these readers' questions?

Refresh

On **How to Add Apps to a Smart TV**, a reader asks:

How do we install an app on our smart tv Vizio if it's not on the list?

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Apply for a Marriage License in Nevada**, a reader asks:

Lost my marriage license same day issue? How to replace it

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Change the Wiper Blades on Your Car**, a reader asks:

How do I change a rear wiper blade on my car?

Your answer...

Reply

Tips

- Don't keep pestering them. Just because they're sick doesn't mean that they don't want space. If they need something, tell them to ask you.
- Wash your hands regularly to avoid spreading germs.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/over-the-counter-flu-remedies>
2. http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/general/influenza_flu_homecare_guide.pdf
3. http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/general/influenza_flu_homecare_guide.pdf

Show more... (16)