



# SUPPORT PARTNER TOOLKIT

TIPS FOR CARING FOR YOURSELF  
WELL CARING FOR A LOVED ONE



## **TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHILE CARING FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE**

*Self-care isn't selfish – it's self-sustaining and essential. You need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping the other person.*

*You aren't alone – information, support, tools, and resources are available.*

*Pay as close attention to your own physical and emotional cues as you do to your partner's. Look for red flags that you may be maxed out, exhausted, or overwhelmed.*

## **YOUR WELLNESS MATTERS**

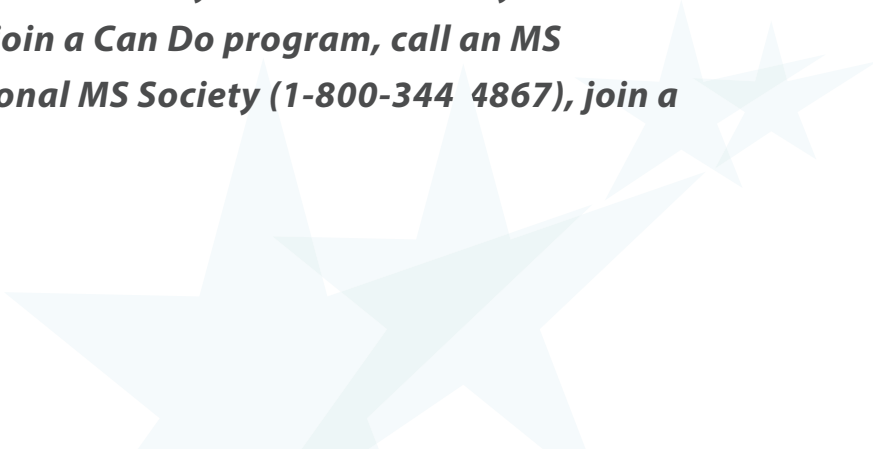
*Build time into your week for the recommended 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise along with 2-3 sessions of resistance training. These activities can be done in small chunks throughout your day.*

*Be sure to make time for yearly visits to your primary care provider for wellness checks and preventive screenings.*

*Learn from a physical therapist (PT) how to provide hands-on care for your loved one while protecting your neck, back, and joints.*

*Try to take time for yourself – to think, enjoy a hobby, see a friend, read a book. These activities are important for your emotional well-being*

*Depression and anxiety are common in support partners. If you feel lost, down, or unusually stressed, talk to your healthcare provider, join a Can Do program, call an MS Navigator at the National MS Society (1-800-344 4867), join a support group.*



## TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR PARTNERSHIP

*Acknowledge your own current and potential losses as well as your partner's.*

*Remember that the MS symptoms you see are just the tip of the iceberg. Overwhelming fatigue, changes in thinking and memory, pain and other sensory problems are common in MS.*

*Make communication a priority – making time to listen as well as talk.*

*Accept that things take longer than they used to, and plan for it.*

*It's OK to ask your partner to use a mobility aid for some things, so that you can share more activities, go at a reasonable pace, and worry less about his or her safety.*

*Don't jump to conclusions about what your partner needs or doesn't need – ask!*

*Think carefully before giving up all the activities you can no longer share; this kind of sacrifice typically ends up feeling bad for both of you.*

*Don't just worry about the unpredictable future – plan for it.*

*If you find yourself talking or behaving in ways you wouldn't want the neighbors to see, it doesn't make you a bad person or bad care partner. It just means it's time to reach out for support and assistance.*

## TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING COMFORTABLY AND EFFECTIVELY

*Listen with intent: make eye contact, confirm what you've heard, don't interrupt, and allow your partner time and space to respond.*

*Speak with intent: slow your pace, if necessary, confirm that you've been understood, avoid accusations and blame by using "I statements" (I think...I wish...I would like to ask...).*

*Assume positive intent until shown otherwise. Just because you don't like what you're hearing doesn't mean you need to shut down or turn off.*

*If you need time to think, formulate a response, or cool down, say so – and commit to coming back to the conversation in a reasonable period of time.*

*A mental health professional can help you jumpstart a difficult conversation by providing a safe and comfortable setting for sharing feelings and thoughts.*



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

Can Do Multiple Sclerosis  
[CanDo-MS.org](http://CanDo-MS.org)

*Support is a Two-Way Street - Article*

*Relationships and Communication - Article*

*Support Partner Voices – Can Do MS Podcast*

*Communication about Tough Topics - Webinar*

*Managing the Impact of Mood & Cognitive Changes - Webinar*

*Caring for the Carers: Wellness Priorities for Support Partners - Webinar*

*Relationships and Building Satisfying Partnerships - Webinar*

*Embracing Carers - Videos*

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

National MS Society

*A Guide For Support Partners - Brochure*

*Going The Extra Mile - Article*

*What Is MS? - Website*

*Understanding MS FAQ's - Website*

*What is MS? - Video*

*MS and Carepartnership: Tips and Inspiration - Video*





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[CANDO-MS.ORG](http://CANDO-MS.ORG)