

Accepting and Managing Offers of Support

We can benefit from accepting offers of help when dealing with health challenges, however managing and coordinating help can be overwhelming and a stress in itself! Here are 10 ideas other patients and families have suggested that you may wish to consider:

1. Say “yes” to all offers of support

– and yes, it may feel very awkward at first. It is very hard receiving support but people often feel privileged to be able to help. Saying “yes” to a number of offers shares the load. If you don’t need the help at the moment, thank the person and let them know that you may call on the offer at a later point. Health care appointments and treatments can be exhausting and delegating and sharing tasks will reduce the impact on just one or two people. If someone offers help, you could say: “Thank you that’s really kind, I’ll let you know what may be helpful when I’ve talked with my



family”, “I’m not sure what we will be needing but will add your name to our list of contacts”, or “I think we’re OK at the moment but please keep offering”. If you say “no” at the beginning of treatment or enough times, people may stop offering - with time, you and the people close to you may start to feel exhausted but everyone may have stopped asking! Guide people in what you need – if they guess they may get it wrong!

2. Generate a list of tasks to delegate

- so that when people offer, you can allocate a task, for example, a regular lift for a child to a sporting activity, a frozen meal, or mowing the lawn. Try to arrange tasks so that they require minimal ongoing organisation or management: for example, meals can be dropped in a cool box at the back door between 4 and 6pm and clean containers returned in a box next to this, the lawn can be mowed at any time, or a basket of ironing left in a carport. Let people know not to ring the doorbell (a note on the door can serve as a reminder) if you don’t want to be disturbed or you wish to preserve a rest period (also you may not always feel like a conversation).

3. Change your answer phone machine and mobile messages to indicate that while you appreciate the call, you’re not always able to return all calls at present.

For example: “You have reached If you are calling with well wishes or offers of support, we really appreciate your call but are unable to return calls at present. We look forward to being in touch when life settles down”, or “...we will let you know of any updates by email”.



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4. Setting up group emails, texts or using private social media sites and “groups” to provide information and updates saves time and effort when you may not feel like socializing or telling the same information again and again.

You may wish to write messages before you go into hospital for a procedure or prior to or after important results. If you are not feeling up to providing updates, it can be helpful to ask a loved one to do this for you on your behalf. It is helpful to be clear that you may be unable to receive visitors/take calls, etc, but may welcome cards or text messages; assure people that you will let them know how they can help when needed. It is however important to carefully think about the information you share and how it may be shared beyond the discussion. It's okay to set boundaries around this if needed - you don't need to provide details and it's not appropriate if anyone pushes for more detail than you are comfortable sharing.

5. Designate one person as your ‘contact person’ - who will take calls and manage message updates.

6. Consider professional help with services - even if just for a few months.

It can allow you and your close ones to invest your energy where it's most needed or best spent. Consider adjusting standards (such as house cleaning) and rules for a while, for example, children may love a few weeks of canteen lunches. Check your entitlements to services with a social worker.

7. Shop online for basic household groceries.

It can be yet another job you don't want to worry about or invest energy. Foods like milk and pet food can be heavy to carry, and some services have a policy of bringing groceries to the kitchen bench. Setting up this service can be a good task to do while awaiting treatment. Try local services, fresh from the market businesses, or major supermarkets; some catering and home delivery services also offer healthy meals.

8. Access local services. Churches, community groups and government agencies may have volunteers or programs to help with meals, gardening or other chores; you can try contacting your local church, community centre, hospital social worker, General Practitioner, or look in your local newspaper to find out what is available.

9. Online free community based calendars

- can make it easier to manage offers to help, for example www.lotsahelpinghands.com, or www.google.com/calendar. Sites may allow you to set up a calendar specifying your particular needs on each day (for example, a lift to and from treatment, or meals with certain dietary requirements). It can be helpful to specify favourite meals so that you don't get spaghetti bolognaise and casseroles every day! It can also be helpful to ask for prepared sandwiches, fruit or snacks for the fridge and freezer. People who may offer assistance can be directed to the calendar so they can choose what help they would like to provide. Many websites can also send automatically generated reminders. Encourage people to organise another helper or their own back up plans if their availability changes so you aren't left trying to manage these. Seek permission to share the contact details of other helpers to assist with this.

10. Review your visitor policy! If you're going into hospital, be clear about whether you want visitors and for how long. Visitors can be exhausting. If you say “pop in for 5 minutes”, people will stay for half an hour, if you say half an hour, it will be all morning! Taking a sign and adhesive for your hospital door or above your bed, and let nursing staff know your “visitor policy” by writing it down. You may want to use it when home too!

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