

# PLAYING A CRITICAL ROLE: LUNG CANCER CAREGIVER

Tips to help you and your loved one  
through the lung cancer journey



LUNG CANCER ALLIANCE

## THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO FOR YOUR LOVED ONE WITH LUNG CANCER.

Being a caregiver comes with a lot of important responsibilities, and it can be easy to overlook your own needs. In fact, some caregivers may even think it's selfish to focus on themselves during this time. But it's important to prioritize your own care, because, as the metaphor goes, *you can't pour from an empty cup*. In other words, the more you take care of yourself, the better prepared you'll be as a caregiver. There are ways to help ensure you are doing everything you can for your loved one, while also taking care of your well-being.

Here are some suggestions to help a loved one as a caregiver throughout the lung cancer journey. Try one or two of these tips that you think might work best for you.

### EAT RIGHT AND EXERCISE.

It may seem obvious, but when you're busy caring for someone else, it's also essential to continue to care for yourself as well. During this time, it's important to maintain a healthy diet and exercise routine. **Think about some creative ways to squeeze in some time to get your blood pumping.** Marilu would often take advantage of time Michael was in the hospital by bringing along sneakers and getting her heart rate up with power walks up and down the hallways and stairwells.

### BRING ON BACK-UP.

For those who have a support network, don't think you need to go through this alone. It can help to talk to other people who have been in similar situations to learn about how they handled the role. Your local hospital or an advocacy group, like Lung Cancer Alliance, can help you find information about an in-person support group you can attend. For many, online groups are a great alternative, as they can offer support if you're pressed for time or have a hard time getting to a group meeting.



Actress Marilu Henner has played dozens of roles while starring in films, Broadway shows and hit classic sitcoms. But ask Marilu, and she will tell you the most meaningful part she's played is the role of caregiver

for her husband, Michael Brown. In 2003, Michael was diagnosed with early-stage lung cancer while undergoing treatment for bladder cancer. Through open communication and support, the experience helped them develop an even closer bond.

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And don't be embarrassed to call upon a professional, like a therapist or psychologist. For Holt Truex, this has been critical. His wife Kathy has been living with lung cancer for many years. “I would definitely advise other caregivers to get support,” Holt said. “Whether you know it or not, you're going to need it, and if you start getting that support right up front, it will help all the way around.”

**To find a therapist, start by looking at your health insurance company's website if you have insurance, or ask friends or family for recommendations.**



## LOOK FOR INFORMATION.

When Michael was diagnosed, Marilu became his primary caregiver — and “doctor concierge,” as they like to say, by helping to research and make appointments with a range of healthcare providers. Together, they reviewed possible treatments and worked with their healthcare team to choose a course of action that was right for them.

Lung cancer treatment has changed significantly in the last decade, so it’s important to seek out the latest information from credible resources. Advancements like targeted therapy and immunotherapy are important treatment options.

“There is more hope than ever before in lung cancer,” said Maureen Rigney, LICSW, director of support initiatives at Lung Cancer Alliance. “In just the past few years, there are now greatly increased treatment options for the disease. Caregivers often play an important role in helping their loved one understand and consider all appropriate treatments for their kind and stage of lung cancer.”

**To learn more about lung cancer and new treatment options, talk to your healthcare team or read more on [LungCancerAlliance.org](https://LungCancerAlliance.org).**



## FIND WAYS TO EXPRESS YOURSELF.

From writing to playing music or even cooking, finding ways to express yourself can be a helpful way to relieve any stress you may feel as a caregiver.

For Marilu, the author of 10 best-selling books, writing about her feelings comes naturally. Some people may want to try to set aside a few minutes per day to journal — whether in a notebook or even on your smartphone. This is a good way to anchor your thoughts, and to help guide conversations with your loved one.

Writing can be a way to not only express your feelings, but also to keep friends and family informed. When Sheila Wheatley was diagnosed with lung cancer, both she and her husband and caregiver Ken started writing blogs. “It was a good way for us to let everyone know how Sheila was doing, without having to share the same updates over and over,” said Ken.

**There are free, easy-to-use websites, such as [CaringBridge.org](https://CaringBridge.org) or [PostHope.org](https://PostHope.org), that allow you to share news and updates with friends and family.\* Through sites like this, people can offer support through their love, hope and compassion in online messages, and also suggest ways to help.**



## HAVE A LAUGH.

Whoever said laughter is the best medicine might have been on to something — it has been shown to produce endorphins that can help relieve pain. Humor can also diminish feelings of anxiety and discomfort.

**Some simple ways to bring a bit more humor to your life might be watching your favorite sitcom, renting a classic comedy movie or even just reading the Sunday comics.**

Marilu and Michael would often joke with each other, and credit humor with helping them get through tough conversations on their cancer journey.

Caregivers play an important part in helping their loved one through the cancer journey, and deserve tremendous thanks for their role. Although caregivers are often selfless in their support, they will likely be better able to care for their loved one if they take care of themselves first. To learn more about lung cancer treatment and support options, visit [LungCancerAlliance.org](https://LungCancerAlliance.org).

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