

# HELPING A LOVED ONE WHILE TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF!



**A Practical Guide for Caregivers  
Assisting the Elderly**

# PRACTICAL GUIDE for Caregivers Assisting the Elderly



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In order to produce this practical guide, we have gathered various tools developed in other places. (See Bibliography)

## PART 1

# GETTING INFORMATION TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND HELP A LOVED ONE



### WHO IS THE ASSISTED PERSON?

A person aged 55 or more:

- in my family or my neighbourhood;
- who needs help, support and a watchful eye on a regular basis;
- who would find it difficult to remain at home without assistance.



### ARE YOU A CAREGIVER?

A caregiver is a person who provides, free of charge, moral support and regular home assistance to an elderly person experiencing a loss of autonomy.

Here are a few examples of what a caregiver can do for a loved one:

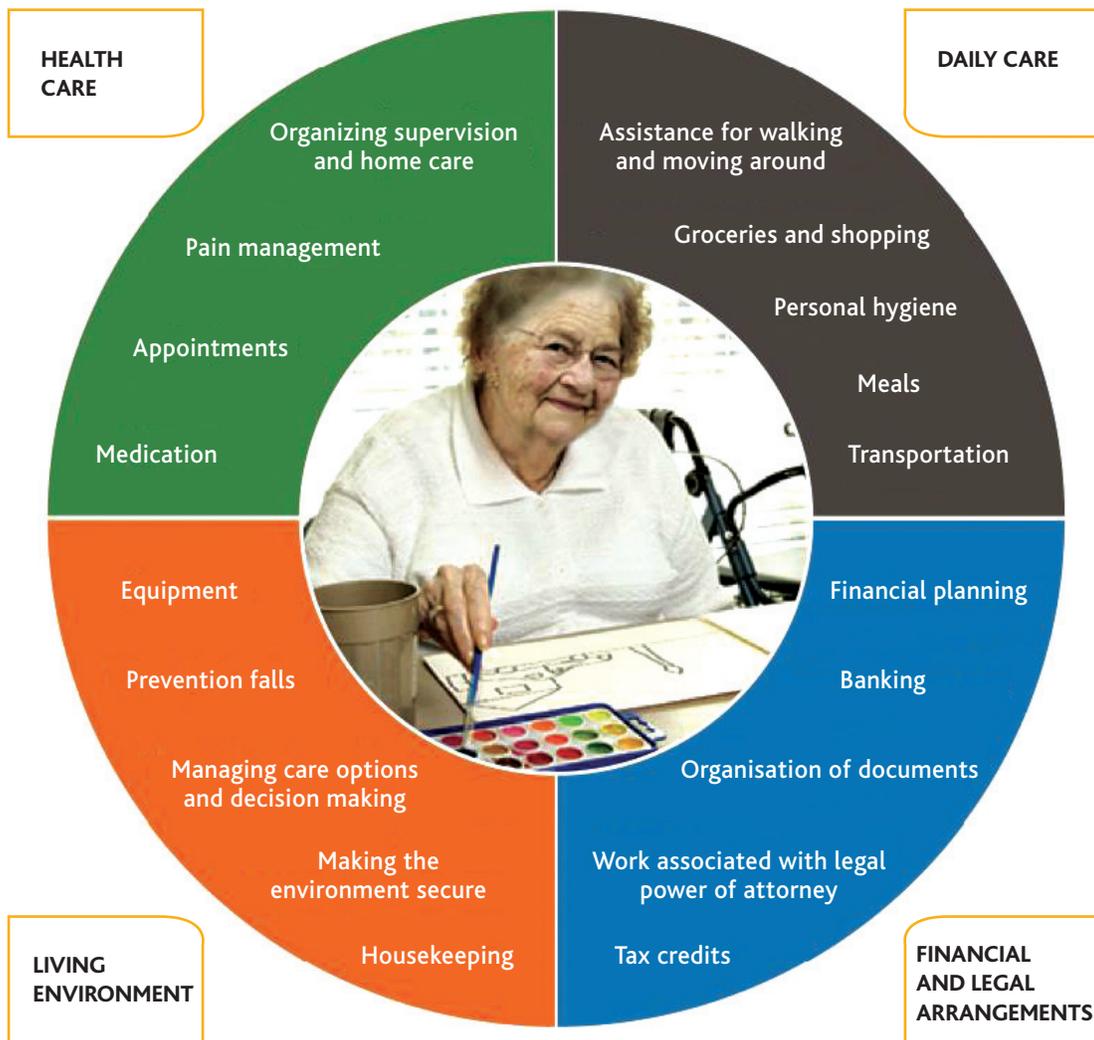
- Prepare meals and help with groceries, shopping, housekeeping;
- Accompany the person to medical or other appointments;
- Assist with grooming, dressing, shaving, combing hair;
- Visit the person and share moments in his or her daily life;

Those are many other examples of the various tasks that a caregiver can perform to help an elderly person. Take time to think of some.



A CAREGIVER IS A PERSON WHO PROVIDES, FREE OF CHARGE, MORAL SUPPORT AND REGULAR HOME ASSISTANCE TO AN ELDERLY PERSON EXPERIENCING A LOSS OF AUTONOMY.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CAREGIVER



Source: The Caregiver's Practical Guide, St. Elisabeth Community Health Services.



## AS A CAREGIVER, I AM ENTITLED



- ♥ ... to show my emotions, to sometimes be tired, angry, depressed or discouraged, to occasionally speak of other difficulties;
- ♥ ... to take some time for myself and to continue to pursue my own specific activities;
- ♥ ... to cultivate reciprocal respect in the relationship with the other;
- ♥ ... to be proud of what I am doing and of my courage in responding to the needs of my loved one;
- ♥ ... to expect some help, either from people close to me or from health care services or other services;
- ♥ ... to expect and demand improvements in the services network so as to physically and mentally support people experiencing a loss of autonomy, as well as their caregivers;
- ♥ ... to be recognized and respected in my role as a caregiver;
- ♥ ... to receive some encouragement and some emotional support;
- ♥ ... to have access to services that help me in assisting others;
- ♥ ... to make mistakes, to fall short of being perfect, to be unable to do everything
- ♥ ... to forgive myself;
- ♥ ... to laugh and to live rather than simply exist.

Source: Adaptation from Jo Horne, *Today's Caregiver*, as well as Elderly Consultation Group of the Granit MRC

## CAREGIVERS YOU ARE NOT ALONE!



- **The number of caregivers assisting the elderly in Quebec is estimated at about 370 000. On average, caregiving takes up five hours or more per week of their time.**
- **In Quebec, one out of every four adults is a caregiver assisting an elderly person.**
- **Between 70% and 85% of the assistance provided to people experiencing a loss of autonomy is provided by caregivers.**
- **59% of caregivers are women.**
- **Care to the elderly is provided mainly by the 45 to 64 age group.**

*Those are many other examples of the various tasks that a caregiver can perform to help an elderly person. Take time to think of some.*

Source: Final Report of the Consultative Committee on National Support regarding the Increased Appreciation of the role of caregivers, February 2015.

## WHY WAIT UNTILL YOU ARE OUT OF BREATH?



### My hesitations as a caregiver

For various reasons having to do with beliefs, promises, and the fear of being judged, caregivers are inclined to seek or to accept help only when they can no longer do otherwise.

- ♥ " It will go away. It's just a bad moment."
- ♥ " I will do things differently. I will sleep a while and will then be in shape."
- ♥ " I could not accept that things be done otherwise."
- ♥ " The services are overloaded since the budget cuts. The state no longer has the means to pay. There are surely others who have greater needs."
- ♥ " That's family business. I will be questioned. I will have to tell them my story one more time. I don't like to see people enquiring about what is my business."
- ♥ " I will have to modify my daily routine and my habits in order to take account of the availability and time schedule of those who come and help me."
- ♥ " In any case, it's so little that it's not worth upsetting everything."



### The hesitations of the assisted person

It is already difficult to accept a loss of autonomy and the need for help from another person in many activities. It's a little easier when the person is a close relation, someone we trust and are well acquainted with.

There is often a fear that the assisted person does not accept work sharing, even when it involves relatives. Disagreements can be even greater when recourse to outside resources is being considered.

- ♥ " That's it! You can no longer take care of me. You might as well put me in an institution."
- ♥ " I'll take care of myself without outside help."
- ♥ " I might as well die."
- ♥ " I don't want to deal with just anyone. I don't want strangers around me."

The hesitations of the assisted person are not always expressed verbally. They can be detected through behavior, gestures, attitudes and tears. In such cases, it is difficult for the caregiver not to feel some kind of guilt.

## PART 2

# EMPOWERING YOURSELF: THE MEANS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

### ASKING FOR HELP

In order to avoid exhaustion, you must be able to define your needs, to avoid exceeding your capacities, and to have recourse to whatever resources are available. You can seek assistance from community organizations and services. For more information, please refer to the Services section on page 16.



### DEFINING MY NEEDS

**In order to accept to seek help, you must first accept that you need help.**

Like all individuals, I must first provide for my basic needs, i.e. feed myself, sleep, do some exercise, take care of myself. This is essential in order to maintain my quality of life. If I neglect those needs, my health will suffer..

In order to preserve a good mental health, I also need security, love and esteem. I need to fulfill myself in the activities I enjoy.

**As a caregiver, I also need some information:**

- regarding the loss of autonomy of the person I'm caring for and the likely evolution of his or her general condition;
- regarding the means of coping with and adapting to the evolution of the situation;
- regarding the resources available and the means of getting access to them.



### NOT EXCEEDING MY CAPACITIES

**By not setting limitations for myself, I am in fact choosing to let others do it for me. It is always incumbent upon me to decide.**

I probably did not at the outset take the time to define how far-reaching will be my commitment toward the person I'm helping. However, it is never too late to do so.

- How much time and how often can I be present or provide some help?  
For how many months or years can I do so?
- What level and type of help and care can I provide: bath, nail cutting, medical dressings, listening, day and night watch, transport assistance?
- When and how often should I take days off or holidays? Who will replace me?
- Am I able to say "no" when someone indicates that he or she is expecting something from me?
- What other responsibilities must I continue to assume: relationship with my spouse and my children, outside work, social life?

**No one is perfect. Accept your limits since you are doing the best you can.**

## HAVING AN ALLY



Make sure you can express your feelings to someone or in a group of people you can trust – people with whom you can laugh and share life experiences, who will listen to you and make you feel good. These people can be relatives, friends or a nurse who takes care of your loved one and with whom you feel at ease.

**Make sure you can express your feelings to someone or in a group of people you can trust – people with whom you can laugh and share life experiences, who will listen to you and make you feel good. These people can be relatives, friends or a nurse who takes care of your loved one and with whom you feel at ease:**

1. Define your priorities and determine what your capacities are. After all, it is impossible to do everything perfectly. Of course, you may not have chosen to help a loved one, but you nevertheless have certain rights concerning the tasks that you will perform to provide assistance.
2. Accept your feelings, both the best and the worse ones. Your reactions are normal; they do not in any way reduce your value or your abilities. Be indulgent toward yourself and remember that you are simply doing the best you can.
3. Take care of your health. Feed yourself in a balanced way, rest if necessary, limit your consumption of alcoholic beverages and see a doctor on a regular basis.
4. Delegate part of your work. Don't hesitate to call on your contacts (relatives, friends, colleagues) and on other resources available in your sector. Some organizations provide specific services to caregivers: enquire about them!
5. Believe in the power of humor. If you and the assisted person can make jokes in the most difficult moments, the situation will magically become much easier to handle.
6. Relax and change your state of mind. Read a good book, call a friend with a positive outlook on life, do some yoga, or watch some entertaining videos. By emptying your mind, you will fill up with energy!

Source: [www.lavantposte.ca](http://www.lavantposte.ca)



## GETTING RID OF YOUR GUILT

One of the feelings most difficult to control is guilt. Who has never felt guilt? It stealthily penetrates our being. To feel guilty means to be unhappy about yourself or to judge your own behavior unacceptable because of a lack of correspondence with your values or the dictates of your conscience.

We hear the little voice in our head suggesting that we ought to be generous, courageous, dedicated, patient – and all of that unconditionally. Very often, we feel guilty because of some impatience or anger on our part or because we have sought a little bit of time for ourselves.

Guilt represents an internal burden which, apart from being useless, weighs down on the already heavy workload associated with the care of the assisted person. That feeling is normal, but a reasonable balance must be found between our needs and those of the other. It is essential that the caregiver be able to get rid of guilt in order that he or she may feel good and in his relationship with the assisted person.

When you take care of a loved one on a daily basis, you experience a whole range of emotions. Even if some emotions are healthy and are part and parcel of the normal phases of human life, others are harmful, especially if they are out of proportion to the situation that prompted them. The main unpleasant emotions experienced by caregivers are:

- anxiety • hostility • sadness • fear • guilt.

Virtually all caregivers feel guilty at some stage or other in their caring relationship.



### ARE YOU ONE OF THEM?

Do you occasionally:

- feel that you are not up to the task?
- have the impression of not doing things the right way?
- regret having made or not having made a certain gesture?



### ABOVE ALL, DO NOT FEEL GUILTY:

- for being healthy while your loved one is so sick;
- for taking time to enjoy yourself, to laugh and to relax;
- for not wishing to take on all responsibilities for the welfare of your loved one;
- for wishing to see your responsibilities disappear so as to experience once more a "semblance of normal life";
- for having lost your temper in front of a loved one;
- for thinking of placing your loved one in a long-term care facility or for having already placed him or her in such a facility.

## THE WEARINESS BAROMETER

### Acknowledging signs of weariness and exhaustion

All caregivers are likely to experience periods of exhaustion that render them vulnerable and frail. The following test was developed by the Laval Association of Caregivers (Association lavalloise des personnes aidantes, or ALPA) and may help you to identify your personal alarm signals.



Signs of Weariness	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Most of the Time
I have difficulty sleeping or often wake up during the night.				
I wake up tired in the morning, I lack energy during the day.				
I have no appetite or eat too much.				
I don't feel well or am sick more often than in the past (flue, cold, headaches).				
I am taking more and more medication.				
I feel irritable and impatient.				
I'm doing a lot and yet feel guilty about not doing enough.				
I find it hard to concentrate (drawing up a list of things to do, paying invoices, reading, etc.)				
I'm inclined to forget simple things (phone numbers, names, keys, etc.)				
I've dropped the activities that I enjoy.				
I have few contacts with people other than the person I'm caring for.				
I have the impression of crying for nothing.				
I feel sad and discouraged.				
I'm anxious about the state of my loved one and about the future.				
I'm tempted to drop everything.				

References: *Guide d'accueil, Intentions des personnes aidantes, Hôpital général de Montréal et Centre hospitalier de Verdun. Guide d'accompagnement à l'intention des personnes aidantes, Association lavalloise des personnes aidantes (ALPA)*

If you have checked the columns "Often" and "Most of the time", you should seek help from your doctor or from workers of the health and social services network.

## REDUCING STRESS

A majority of caregivers experience stress on a daily basis. However, stress can have a serious impact on health. Excessively intensive stress or an accumulation of stress over a long period can lead to exhaustion and even depression.

Remain attentive to certain signs of stress that can be harmful to your health, in particular the following:

- irritability;
- anxiety;
- excessive emotionalism;
- excessive loss or increase of appetite;
- loss of interest for your favorite activities;
- sleeping problems (not enough or too much sleep);
- frequent health problems.



**If you detect one or several of these signs, do not hesitate to see your doctor.**

In spite of your good will, your role as a caregiver will inevitably be a source of stress at certain moments. To put things into perspective and adapt to the situation, you can have recourse to various stress management techniques, like meditation, yoga, long walks, etc.



AS A CAREGIVER,  
I AM ENTITLED TO  
TAKE SOME TIME  
FOR MYSELF AND  
TO CONTINUE TO  
PURSUE MY OWN  
SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES.

## RÉDUISEZ VOTRE STRESS



### *Stress Test for Caregivers*

Caregivers often say that they suffer from a high stress level. The following test will help you to become aware of your feelings and of the stress that you are currently experiencing. Do the test and consult the following sections to find out more about the resources that might be helpful to you.

The answers are: **Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Usually** or **Always**

\_\_\_\_\_ I find that I don't have enough rest.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't have enough time for myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ Because of the person I'm caring for, I don't have time for other members of the family.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel guilty about my situation.

\_\_\_\_\_ I now rarely go out.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is a conflict between the person I'm caring for and myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ There is a conflict between myself and other members of the family.

\_\_\_\_\_ I cry every day.

\_\_\_\_\_ I worry about not having enough money to make ends meet.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think I lack the know-how and experience required to provide care as well as I would like.

\_\_\_\_\_ My health is not good.

If your answer to two or more of the statements above is "Usually" or "Often", it may be time for you to seek help in caring for your loved one or in taking care of yourself.

## RÉDUISEZ VOTRE STRESS



## 10 *Tips for Caregivers*

Following are ten tips for caregivers. These tips can help you to provide the best care possible while remaining in good physical and emotional shape.

- 1 Seek help for the tasks and chores from the onset of the disease. Your loved one will thus get accustomed to seeing other people in the house.
- 2 Get other members of the family or mutual friends involved from the onset of the disease, even if you are the only person watching the changes.
- 3 Seek as much information as possible on the condition of the elderly person and find out as much as you can about the evolution of the disease. Useful sources of information include disease-specific organizations, doctors, public libraries and reliable online resources.
- 4 Acknowledge that anger, anxiety and guilt are normal feelings and learn to accept them as part of the experience you are going through. Those feelings arise not only because you are weary, but also because of the loss that you are experiencing. There are other caregivers who are in the same situation and who have the same feelings.
- 5 Join a caregivers group as soon as possible. Whether they meet on line or face to face, caregivers groups provide good opportunities to share your thoughts and your experiences, to listen to others, to express your feelings and to get some useful tips. There is no need for you to go through this alone.
- 6 Every change experienced by the family member or friend requires more adaptation or change from you: acknowledge that this sometimes entitles you to not always be in top shape.
- 7 Forgive yourself for not being perfect. Taking care of someone suffering from a chronic disease can turn your life upside down.
- 8 Develop a good relationship with the doctor and the health care team of the person you care for and take some time to speak to them privately if you feel a need to do so.
- 9 See your doctor regularly, have a well-balanced diet and try to take some time to express sadness, anger or a sense of powerlessness. Accept the fact that you are human and try to do at least one thing that you like every day.
- 10 Take things one day at a time while at the same time planning for the future. Good planning requires that you find out from the onset about legal and financial issues or about matters of placement in a nursing home and to take the time to plan and implement change according to need.

Remember: BE INDULGENT TOWARDS YOURSELF.

Source: *Guide for Caregivers*, Research Center, St. Mary's Hospital (2013)

## IN SHORT

The role of the caregiver can sometimes have major consequences. You now know that you can access many resources to alleviate your workload. Don't hesitate to use them and, above all, take care of yourself!


**TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF: 10 SUGGESTIONS**

1. Be good to yourself; don't allow yourself to feel guilty; offer yourself some rewards; criticize yourself in a constructive way; dare to seek help.
2. Remember that you are not a magician; your own resources and your capacities are limited; be aware of those limitations and let people around you know what they are.
3. Find an oasis, a quiet place where you can rest and recover, where you can take refuge for half an hour (at a minimum) a day.
4. Be your own best resource; appeal to your creativity; find new approaches.
5. Set up your own support network, a network of friends who can understand you and be a source of help, trust and guidance.
6. Learn how to accept support.
7. In social meetings or visits, avoid expounding on or trotting out problems.
8. Learn to set your limits, to say no. What is the worth of your "yes" if you don't know how to say "no"? Say "I don't want to" rather than "I must".
9. Rekindle yourself through laughter and games.
10. Ask yourself certain questions:
  - ♥ Do you have interests other than your role as a caregiver?
  - ♥ What new activity have you undertaken recently?
  - ♥ What new friendships have you developed?
  - ♥ What is entertaining in such and such a situation?
  - ♥ Can you laugh at yourself? At others? At funny situations? At life in general (without bitterness)?

Source: *Devenir aidant, ça s'apprend, Chaire Desjardins en soins infirmiers à la personne âgée à la famille. (2013)*



## PART 3

# KNOWING THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

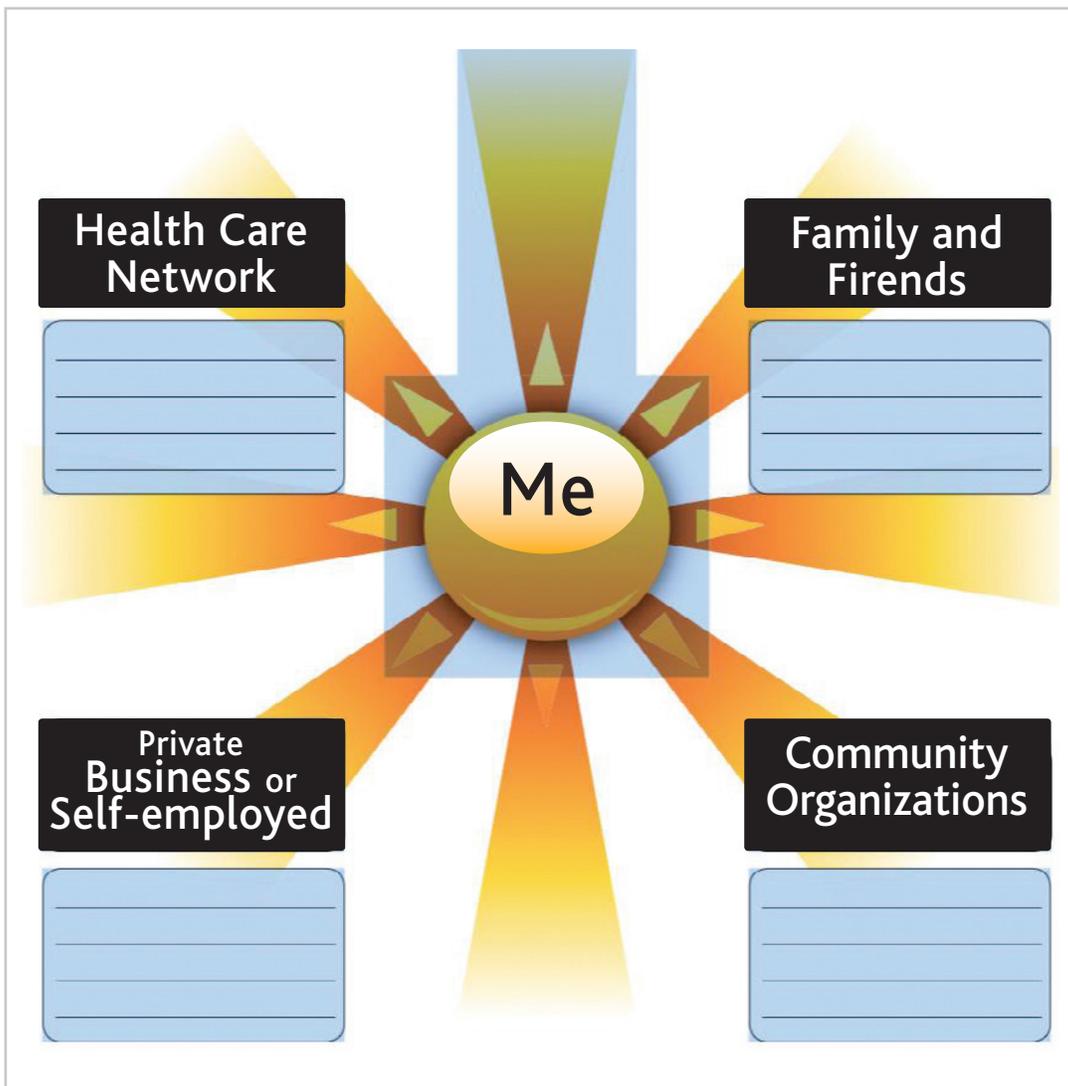
## GETTING ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES ACCORDING TO YOUR NEEDS

When one takes care of a loved one, there is plenty of needs! There are many types of services that can make your life simpler: domestic help, home delivery, preparation of meals, respite services, transportation by volunteers.



## RESOURCES TO HELP YOU BUILD YOUR OWN NETWORK

Fill in boxes below to identify your help network.  
By doing so, you will put more sunshine into your life.



Source : Proches aidants d'aînés, Guide d'accompagnement, l'Appui des Laurentides, 2015

## SERVICES

There are many organizations and bodies in Montreal that are of relevance to you as a caregiver or to the person you are assisting.

Find out below about the services that might be useful to you.



## LISTENING CENTRES

### L'APPUI MONTRÉAL

Caregiver Info Line  
1 855 852-7784  
listening-information-references  
[info@lappuimontreal.org](mailto:info@lappuimontreal.org)  
[lappuimontreal.org](http://lappuimontreal.org)

### TEL-AÎNÉS, TEL ÉCOUTE

6665 de Marseille Street  
Montreal  
514 353-2463  
1 877 353 2460  
[tel-ecoute.org](http://tel-ecoute.org)

### LA LIGNE AIDE ABUS AÎNÉS

514 489-2287 1 888 489 2287  
Listening - Support - Information  
Telephone assessment  
Intervention approach  
[aideabusaines.ca](http://aideabusaines.ca)  
Territory: All of Quebec

### SUICIDE ACTION MONTRÉAL - SAM

1 866 277-3553  
[suicideactionmontreal.org](http://suicideactionmontreal.org)

### DÉPRIMÉS ANONYMES

P.B. 215, R Branch,  
Montreal  
514 278-2130  
[deprimesanonymes.org](http://deprimesanonymes.org)

### LA LIGNE RÉFÉRENCE AÎNÉS

Information about staying at home  
Transport- Leisure- Defending rights  
Support groups  
514 527-0007 (Monday-Friday,  
from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)  
[info-reference.qc.ca](mailto:info-reference.qc.ca)  
Territory: Montreal



AS A CAREGIVER, I AM ENTITLED TO EXPECT SOME HELP, EITHER FROM PEOPLE CLOSE TO ME OR FROM HEALTH CARE SERVICES OR OTHER SERVICES.

## SERVICES

### FOOD SERVICES

**ASSOCIATION DES POPOTES ROULANTES DU MONTRÉAL MÉTROPOLITAIN**  
 (works closely with the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal)  
 1919 St. James St. West  
 Montreal, 514 937-4798  
[popoteroulante.org](http://popoteroulante.org)  
 Territory: Greater Montreal

**MULTI-CAF**  
 3591 Appleton Ave.  
 Montreal, 514 733-0554  
[multicaf.org](http://multicaf.org)  
 Territory: Côte-des-Neiges/Snowdon

**SANTROPOL ROULANT**  
 111 Foy St. East  
 Montréal, 514 284-9335  
[santropolroulant.org/fr/](http://santropolroulant.org/fr/)  
 Territory: NDG, Côte-des-neiges, Centre-South, Downtown, Westmount and Plateau

**NOTRE DAME DES NEIGES PARISH**  
 5366, ch. de la Côte-des-Neiges  
 Montreal, 514 738-1987  
[diocesemontreal.org](http://diocesemontreal.org)  
 Territory: Côte-des-Neiges

**ST-PASCAL-BAYLON CHURCH**  
 6570 Côte-des-Neiges  
 Montreal, 514 738-1214  
[diocesemontreal.org](http://diocesemontreal.org)  
 Territory: Côte-des-Neiges



### HOUSEKEEPING

**LA GRANDE VADROUILLE**  
 Domestic services  
 514 341-0443  
 Territory: CDN, NDG, Metro, MTL West

**PLUMEAU, CHIFFON ET CIE**  
 514 523-6626  
[plumeau.qc.ca](http://plumeau.qc.ca)  
 Territory: Plateau Mont-Royal, Centre-South, Downtown



## SERVICES



### DAY CENTER

**INSTITUT UNIVERSITAIRE  
DE GÉRIATRIE DE MONTRÉAL**  
Pavillon Alfred-Desrochers  
4565 Queen Mary Road  
Montreal, 514 340-3562 (ergotherapy)  
[iugm.qc.ca](http://iugm.qc.ca)  
Territory: Côte-des-Neiges,  
Mount-Royal, Outremont Snowdown,  
Côte-St-Luc, Hampstead

**CENTRE ÉVASION**  
5701, Décarie Blvd.  
Montreal  
514 738-5151  
[centreevasion.com](http://centreevasion.com)  
Territory: Montreal



### HOSPITALS

**JEWISH GENERAL HOSPITAL**  
3755 Chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine  
Montreal, 514 340-8222  
[jgh.ca](http://jgh.ca)

**ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL**  
3830 Lacombe Ave.  
Montreal  
514 345-3511  
[chsm.qc.ca](http://chsm.qc.ca)

**MONTREAL GENERAL HOSPITAL**  
1650 Cedar Ave.  
Montreal  
514 934-1934  
[cusm.ca](http://cusm.ca)

**HÔTEL-DIEU DE MONTRÉAL**  
3840 Saint-Urbain St.,  
Pavillon Marie-Morin  
Montreal  
514 890-8000  
[chummtl.qc.ca](http://chummtl.qc.ca)

**HÔPITAL NOTRE DAME**  
1560 Sherbrooke Street East  
Montreal  
514 890-8000

**HÔPITAL SAINT LUC**  
1058 Saint-Denis St.  
Montreal  
514 890-8000



## BIBLIOGRAPHY



The content of this guide is based on various adaptations of the documents listed below. We wish to thank the following organizations that have authorized us to reproduce excerpts from their documents subject to acknowledging their source:

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2. *Proches aidants d'ânés, Accompagner tout en gardant l'équilibre, Guide d'accompagnement et d'information à l'attention des proches aidants d'ânés, 2015.*
3. *Aider un proche au quotidien, Trucs et astuces pour les aidants, IUGM, en collaboration avec la Chaire Desjardins en soins infirmiers à la personne âgée et à la famille, 2011.*
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