



## Care for the Caregivers—Take Care of Yourselves About YOU!

If you are the caregiver of a cat with lymphoma or any disease, you have taken on a loving, challenging responsibility. You may be at the point where this is a 24-hour a day problem. And it is a heavy load to carry, don't let anybody tell you it isn't. Whatever you feel is OK—join our yahoo group, the link is on this website—we are always there for you, and someone has experienced EXACTLY what you are experiencing now.

You may be exhausted; depressed; crying a lot; resentful and angry with yourself, family, friends, and your beloved cat; guilty—the entire range of hurtful emotions seems to be right there at the ready when your loved one is sick.

### Family and Friends

Those closest to you may not understand. They might not approve. They might say, “it's just a cat,” “it is cruel to let the cat suffer,” “you are being selfish,” “you should have done more,” “we do not have the money.” There are bound to be differences of opinion—that is totally natural. But if you are the main caregiver/parent of the sick cat, it is up to you and the cat to determine how to proceed. It is hard to do, but do not feel guilty about your choices—you are doing the best you can. (These are the very same things that we deal with in our human interactions when we are the caregiver or have to make medical decisions for a family member or friend.)

This may cause animosity and ill feelings with your family and friends. This is also natural—they all want what is best for you and your feline companion. But as in everything in life—it is up to YOU to make decisions, although this is the hard path to follow. And, your cat may be able to help.

### YOUR cat

You know your cat better than anyone else knows him/her. Your decisions will be dictated by:

- \* The age of your cat.
- \* The overall general health of your cat.
- \* Your cat's temperament--how your cat reacts to treatments, travel, being handled by strangers--and these factors may change over time.
- \* The ability of your cat to respond to treatment and to keep eating.

Your cat may also avoid you at times, since you are the one taking him/her to the vet and giving the medication. This is very hard to handle, since you are only trying to help and give your cat love and life. Your cat may change its behavior or sleep in a different place or have ‘accidents’ around the house. This is a natural behavior for cats—they are not angry (although they are smart enough to remember situations)--just avoiding things that are not very pleasant for them. You may be afraid that you won't be able to get to your cat to give the medicines. It really helps if you explain what's going on to your cat, both out loud and in your thoughts. People and animals who have close relationships learn many ways to communicate—that doesn't necessarily mean your cat will cooperate more fully, but it does mean that you are communicating clearly, and you and your cat will both benefit from that.

You might even feel guilty about giving your cat the medications. But the meds are needed, the food is needed, and unless things are going very, very badly and your cat is really going downhill, these medications and food will help the little critter get better and stronger and live longer and happier. To quote Frank Klein, a member of our yahoo lymphoma group: "Pets can be a lot like kids. They don't always understand why we do things they don't like, but sometimes we have to do them anyway, because we know what is best for them." Don Miguel Ruiz wrote a book, *The Four Agreements*. The 4th Agreement is to always do your best--at first I thought that was not a fair expectation until I read further, your best is NEVER going to be the same from moment to moment, because of your circumstances. "If you try too hard to do more than your best, you will spend more energy than is needed and in the end your best will not be enough. When you overdo, you deplete your body and go against yourself, and it will take you longer to accomplish your goal."

If you need help with getting your cat to eat, go to <http://assistfeed.com>

## **The Money and Time**

These are constraints we all live with in our every day lives. Many of the therapies that your cat needs may cost more money than you can afford. (See our resource section for possible sources of support.) You might choose to spend the money anyway, you might find a way, or you might try to find alternatives—all of these choices are acceptable and available to you.

You may have other family members to care for...you may have a job or more than one job...you may be tired to your last bone. Join our yahoo group, the link is on this website—we are always there for you, and someone has experienced EXACTLY what you are experiencing now.

## **Stages of Grief**

Even if your kitty cat is not near death, he/she still may require a lot of energy and resources. We all are equipped with enormous stores of energy to help others in time of need—but we need to make sure that we understand what is going on around us—that we appreciate what is going on in our lives.

The stages of grief—even if your companion is still alive, the stages of grief may apply: anger, guilt, depression, and grieving, itself. You may be angry with your family for not understanding or angry with yourself for not noticing an early sign of illness. This is natural. You might feel guilty because you are choosing one therapy over another or because you don't have the very best veterinary help or because you don't have all of the information you need to help you with your decisions. This is natural, and it is between you and your cat.

You may be depressed at the upcoming possible loss of your dear one or depressed at the whole situation. You may be very sad that your cat is sick or in pain. You may be sad and guilty that you are also sick and in pain. Of course, this is natural. You may begin grieving early—crying, afraid, worried, troubled. This is also natural. Do not blame yourself: notice what is going on and be honest with yourself. All of the people on the yahoo feline lymphoma listserv have been through what you're going through—that does not make it easier for you to bear, but it does give you a place to go to learn how to cope, how to treat your cat, and how to deal with your own feelings. There are other resources available on this website and listed below.

## **Take Time to Take Care of YOU!!!**

If you have ever ridden on an airplane, you know that they instruct that if you are traveling with an infant to put your own oxygen mask on first and then attend to the child. This is because if YOU pass out, there will be no help for the child. That's the same way with everything in life, even for those who are always on the giving end.

The following are some suggestions, but we know that dedicated caregivers might not be able to accept these suggestions. They are not offered as medical advice, and they do not come from a

nutritionist—they come from the hearts of the people who have been dealing with cats with lymphoma. They are offered as information, so that you know that it is really OK, indeed, desirable to take care of yourself.

\* **Eating well**—good nutrition includes high quality protein, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lots of fresh water. Make sure you eat 3 meals a day or the equivalent. This is vital, and do not feel guilty that you are taking the time out to eat. You must continue, and your cat wants you to.

### \* Eating tips for easy meals:

\* Keep yogurt around—good for protein, easy to digest, and no preparation necessary. And your kitty might like some too!

\* Keep some frozen, organic dinners around, so that you can easily fix yourself something in just a few minutes (macaroni and cheese, vegetable casseroles, vege-burgers, etc.) We're recommending organic because they are good for you, but just like with your cat, ANY good nutritious food is better than none.

\* A good, fast, easy meal: a sandwich of bacon or cheese or turkey, lettuce, and tomato on whole grain bread.

\* An apple or a banana with peanut butter

\* Cereal with fruit

\* Milk

\* Pasta with olive oil or butter and parmesan cheese

\* Egg salad sandwich, hard-boiled eggs, scrambled eggs with whole wheat toast.

\* Rice and lentils—just put them in the same pot to cook with some butter, some ginger, pepper, mustard seed, cumin seed—anything you want—the Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda, considers this a perfect healing food.

\* Take a multi-vitamin every day.

\* **Rest**—this is hard if you are worrying, restless, feeling anxious, having to hand feed your cat. But you must figure out a way to get the proper rest. You might try warm milk before bed or ask your doctor's advice. Naps are good too, if you have the time. Take warm, revitalizing showers or warm, relaxing baths every day.

\* **Respite**—this is hardest of all. Give yourself some time off, without guilt or worry. No one care for your cat better than you can. But in some circumstances, it may be possible to take a little time off. Perhaps a loved one can care for your cat for a day or so; your vet's office may have qualified technicians that can visit or there may be qualified pet sitters in your area. Perhaps a friend or loved one can do your grocery shopping, help you clean house, help with the laundry, stop by with a meal. We've heard that people LIKE to be asked to help.

\* **Exercise**—stretch a little, walk a little, dance around the house a little—even for a few minutes get outside in the fresh air.

\* Use an eastern method of relaxation such as controlled breathing. Meditate. Listen to calming music. There are many CDs available with guided imagery that can help you rest and relax. Get a massage!