salto health

Caring for Someone with Cancer

For the person holding the rest of it together

> ## Almost nothing in cancer care is aimed at you.
>
> The meals, the messages, the flowers all go to the person in treatment, which makes sense, and it leaves you standing next to it.
>
> **This one is yours.**

YOU ARE IN IT TOO

When someone is diagnosed, an entire household goes into treatment. You are on hold with insurance, tracking medications, driving to appointments, and answering the same questions from everyone who loves you both. And when someone asks how you are, you say fine and change the subject.

> Both things are true at once. It is not about you, and it is also about you.

SYSTEMS THAT MAKE THE WEEK SMALLER

> **One notebook.** Not five places. Appointments, questions, medication changes, phone numbers. Take it everywhere.

> **One person carries the updates.** Repeating news is exhausting. Choose someone to relay it and point everyone at them.

> **A running list of what would help.** Not for anyone else. For the moment someone asks what they can do and your mind goes blank.

> **Give people specific jobs.** Most people want to be useful and are relieved to be told how. “Can you take Tuesdays” is easier to say yes to than “let me know.”

> **Accept the help offered.** Not the help you would have chosen. Someone bringing the wrong dinner is still a dinner you did not cook.

WHAT RUNNING EMPTY LOOKS LIKE

It is quieter than people expect. Not collapse. This:

- Irritability that surprises you
- Sleep that does not restore anything
- Skipping your own appointments
- Snapping at the person you are caring for, then carrying it for days
- A flat, going-through-the-motions quality to the days

None of that means you are failing at this. It means you are carrying something without relief.

LOOK AFTER YOUR OWN HEALTH

- Keep your own appointments. They are the first thing to slide.
- Tell your own doctor what you are managing at home. It is relevant.
- If low mood, exhaustion, or anxiety is persistent, say so out loud to someone.
- Many cancer centers have support specifically for caregivers, often free. Ask.

YOU ARE ALLOWED TO NEED THINGS

If there is a Gift List, put something on it for yourself. Nobody will think less of you, and most people will be relieved to finally have something concrete to do.

Taking an hour that is genuinely yours, with nothing attached to it, is not a luxury. It is what makes the next week possible.

THREE SENTENCES WORTH KEEPING

You cannot pour from a household that is running empty.

Looking after yourself is not taking something away from them.

You are allowed to find this hard.