

## Tips From Caregivers for Caregivers: *Taking Care of Your Recovering Warrior*

As a caregiver of a recovering service member or veteran, you will take on many new roles and responsibilities. Seasoned caregivers have designed this Toolkit with you in mind to give you advice and suggestions on staying organized, managing the learning curve, and making the most of your role on your service member's medical team. As one military caregiver noted, "There are two types of support I need as a caregiver: one for me dealing with my spouse's injury, and one for me dealing with me dealing with my spouse's injury."



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# Stay Organized

*"Discharge was scary. I was responsible for so many aspects of my husband's care. It was a relief to know what to do when I had questions. It helped us avoid extra trips to the emergency room."*

- **Start a calendar** devoted to your recovering warrior to keep track of the many appointments you both will need to attend.
- **Keep a daily journal** so you can record notes from appointments, conversations with health care professionals, and any other important information you were given that day.
- **Maintain a medication log<sup>1</sup>** including dosages and restrictions.
- **Arrange your paperwork and files to stay organized<sup>2</sup>** so you can easily locate them in the future. Some caregivers find it helpful to store documents online using free storage, such as Google Drive.
- **Ask for help from volunteers and case managers** when you become overloaded with information. They can organize documents and brief you on what's important.

## Resources

1. <http://www.caregiver.va.gov/pdfs/MedicationLog.pdf>

2. [http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/ResourceGuides/KeepingItAllTogether\\_May2012.pdf](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/ResourceGuides/KeepingItAllTogether_May2012.pdf)

*For additional caregiver information, visit*  
***[www.MilitaryFamily.org/caregiver](http://www.MilitaryFamily.org/caregiver)***



# Get the Information You Need

*"I learned all that I could about PTSD and TBI so that I could understand as best I could what my husband was going through. Once I did that, I could then intellectually understand that his outbursts and emotional distance from me were all symptoms of his conditions. All of this helped me to be a better caregiver and got me off the roller coaster of emotions."*

- **Ask other caregivers** where they have found information on the medical conditions affecting their service member.
- **Take the lead** in **advocating**<sup>3</sup> for your service member and your family.
- **Call MilitaryOneSource**<sup>4</sup> and identify yourself as a wounded warrior family member. Their specialty consultants can answer questions, make referrals, or create a 96-hour plan of action to help you resolve your issue.
- **Develop a list of resources** who can answer questions about your service member's condition. Get phone numbers and email addresses for all potential contacts.
- **Understand the appropriate steps to take** if there's a problem or you have questions about your service member's condition after discharge from the hospital.

## Resources

3. [http://www.transitionassistanceprogram.com/portal/transition/resources/PDF/Compensation\\_and\\_Benefits\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.transitionassistanceprogram.com/portal/transition/resources/PDF/Compensation_and_Benefits_Handbook.pdf)

4. [http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Factsheets/MOS\\_Flier\\_Wounded\\_Warrior.pdf](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Factsheets/MOS_Flier_Wounded_Warrior.pdf)

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# Get Involved With the Medical Team

*“I had never had an injured husband before and I’m not in the Army. I didn’t know what questions I should ask. Whenever I didn’t understand, I would always say ‘Please tell me more.’ It keeps the doctor talking, allowing you get to more information.”*

- **Attend medical appointments** for your service member whenever you have the opportunity.
- **Learn how to ask questions**, even when you don’t know **what to ask**<sup>5</sup>. Saying, “please tell me more” helps draw out details you may not have otherwise found. To be a part of the team, you need to understand what’s happening with your service member’s condition and care.
- **Recruit a friend or family member** to attend medical appointments with you and take notes while you listen. Having an extra set of ears will ensure that you don’t miss important information. You can talk with each other about the appointment afterwards and journal any questions for the next appointment.
- **Get a direct phone number** to the nurse’s station—especially if your service member has spent a significant amount of time in the hospital. The nurses who cared for your service member are an excellent source of information after discharge.
- **Don’t be intimidated** by medical jargon. If you don’t understand something from the medical team, ask questions until you do. It can be overwhelming to receive so much information all at once, but the more you know the better you’ll be able to help the team caring for your service member.

## Resources

5. [http://www.caregiver.va.gov/pdfs/Questions\\_to\\_Ask\\_a\\_Veterans\\_Health\\_Care\\_Providers.pdf](http://www.caregiver.va.gov/pdfs/Questions_to_Ask_a_Veterans_Health_Care_Providers.pdf)

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## Tips From Caregivers for Caregivers: *Taking Care of Yourself*

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Caregiving can be a full time job and, for most caregivers, it's one of many roles you play within your family. It's easy to get overwhelmed by competing obligations. Too many caregivers make their own well-being a low priority, so their physical and emotional health suffer. Seasoned caregivers recognize this and have designed this Toolkit to provide advice and suggestions on taking care of yourself. As one military caregiver noted, "There are two types of support I need as a caregiver: one for me dealing with my spouse's injury, and one for me dealing with me dealing with my spouse's injury."



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## Ask for Help

*“You should appoint a person to handle communications for you. I had one civilian and one military. I would call to tell them what was going on and they would make the other 50 calls to update people on the latest surgery.”*

- **Keep a list** of those who have offered help so you can reach out to them when you need to. You may not yet know the type of help you need, but when you do, this list will make things easier.
- **Select one or two people** you trust to communicate with the rest of your family and friends. This allows you to limit your outgoing calls and know that important people in your life are still kept informed.
- **Start a free personalized webpage** through **CaringBridge**<sup>1</sup> to share quick updates to family and friends who live far away.
- **Create a list of tasks** you would be comfortable delegating to family and friends—things like doing laundry, writing thank you notes, providing meals, and driving kids to activities.
- **Seek professional counseling** to help you deal with the emotional toll of caregiving. It can help you process the grief, gain acceptance of the situation, and respond to emotional challenges. To find counselors in your area, visit **Military OneSource**<sup>2</sup>.

### Resources

1. <http://www.caringbridge.org>
2. <http://www.militaryonesource.mil>

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## Seek Other Caregivers

*"I would have liked to have a mentor. A peer caregiver who has been where I am standing now. The amount of information we receive is overwhelming, yet often repetitive. The truly valuable resources for support, contacts, and information come from our fellow caregivers."*

- **Download** the **DoD Caregiver Resource Directory**<sup>3</sup>. This National Resource Directory vetted guide covers topics ranging from benefit information to suicide prevention and more.
- **Find a mentor** or peer support group (online or in person) of other military caregivers. Check with your **local installation**<sup>4</sup> for information on any groups that may meet in your area.
- **Use the power of social media** (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to identify resources as you transition into your new role. Other caregivers are generally happy to share a little advice, and their knowledge of programs and services that will help you.
- **Always confirm informally shared information with official sources.** All situations are different, and while a fellow caregiver may provide information that was helpful for their wounded warrior, it's important to check with medical experts or case managers about your own loved one's situation.
- **Resist the urge to compare** your situation to that of other caregivers. Pull yourself away from groups that become negative or unproductive

### Resources

3. <http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/files/2013/08/Caregiver-Directory-Printer-Friendly-8-5-x-11.pdf>

4. <http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil/MOS/f?p=MI:ENTRY:0>

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# Take Care of Yourself

*“The hardest part is taking care of yourself. All the advice is on how to take care of your spouse. It is hard to pull yourself out. I don’t mean to sound terrible, but for me to get a break, I need to get away from my service member, get away from the situation.”*

- **Slow down** and create small breaks for yourself. Try 10 minutes of yoga or a walk around the neighborhood, or a phone call with a friend to help you to recharge and carry on.
- **Consider utilizing respite care.** Find a trusted friend or relative who can consistently step in and help. If that isn’t available, there are organizations that provide respite care for military caregivers; **TRICARE**<sup>5</sup> and the **VA**<sup>6</sup> are two options.
- **Find a retreat specifically for military caregivers** or families of wounded warriors. It can be a great networking opportunity and help a new caregiver adjust to his/her role. It will also provide a break from the day-to-day routine. **The National Military Family Association**<sup>7</sup>, **Wounded Warrior Project**<sup>8</sup>, and **Operation Homefront’s Hearts of Valor**<sup>9</sup> are examples of organizations that provide military caregiver or wounded warrior family retreats.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Chances are, you’re a first-time caregiver still learning how to help your recovering warrior. Give yourself time to adjust and, above all, know you are not alone.
- **Find one activity that is just for you**, away from being a caregiver. Join a book club, take a regular fitness class, incorporate meditation into your day, or write a blog.

## Resources

5. <http://www.tricare.mil/respite>

6. [http://www.caregiver.va.gov/support\\_services.asp](http://www.caregiver.va.gov/support_services.asp)

7. <http://www.militaryfamily.org/our-programs/operation-purple/wounded-warriors-families>

8. <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/family-support/family-support-retreat.aspx>

9. <http://www.heartsofvalor.org>

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