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Tips from a Working Caregiver

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Part of her role as director of education at Southern Wine & Spirits of Illinois is to develop time management curricula, so when Mary Barranco was confronted with caring for her husband through his treatment while working full time, she created a management plan. Here are some of her key ingredients.

Be honest. Let your supervisor know what is happening and what your plan is. I let my boss know that I could do my job with some flexibility for chemo appointments, doctor visits, and surgeries. I also reassured him that if the situation changed, I would be honest. He promised the same.

Remember, your employer is watching. They want to be reassured that you can manage. I made a point to put on makeup and dress professionally when I went to the office. Sometimes that meant keeping an overnight bag in my car. I knew if I looked frazzled, it would draw more attention. Sometimes the effort even made me feel better.

I told co-workers that I didn't want to discuss my husband's illness, but would give updates as I could. I knew I would be very emotional, so I opted not to discuss it in the presence of my employer until I could gain control of my emotions.

When you go to work—go to work. The familiar routine and stresses can be very therapeutic and can clear your head of the worries at home.

Be realistic about what is possible. If you are allowing yourself to feel torn while at work, you are only building more emotional stress into your day.

Accept the help of others. My sister helped with my children, and the children stepped up to take on more responsibility. Joe's parents sat with him on many of the days he was bedridden. Friends would visit and occasionally bring a meal. When anyone was with him, I could work or rest. I was resistant at first, but today, Joe talks about how much he appreciated others staying with him because they provided socialization and helped take his mind off his illness. He has even commented that those visits enhanced his relationships.

Accept the fact that you will sometimes mess up. I forgot my daughter's

parent-teacher conference one night on my way home from the hospital. I prayed that night for peace of mind. She completed the school year just fine.

Promise to give back. If you can accept help from others, make a mental note of what helped you the most and return it to a family in crisis when you are able.