BY ALAN GOLDBERG, MSW
ANA Board President, and
Caregiver for wife with an AN

Those who have been diagnosed with an acoustic neuroma have learned that things have changed. You might not hear quite as well as you once did, your eyes are dry and your balance may be off. The buzzing in your ears just won’t stop and you might feel like an alien force has taken over your body.

As a caregiver — a partner, spouse, friend, neighbor, relative, co-worker — we can’t tell you that we understand how you feel. Most of us haven’t experienced a brain tumor of any type. We can try to provide support but we don’t always know what to do.

As a caregiver we have a dual role — to support the AN patient in our life as well as take care of ourselves. Here are a few thoughts:

Gather information

Learn as much as you can about acoustic neuromas, especially the variety of treatment options based on the stage and symptoms of the AN. Treating an AN takes more than a neurosurgeon — learn about the best vestibular therapists, audiologists, social workers and psychologists.

Knowledge is power. ANA’s website has just updated medical research articles and has extensive information about the AN experience.

Recognize a “New Normal”

You may be called on to take responsibility for things you usually haven’t done. Paying bills or doing errands may not be the normal (I’m terrible figuring out carpools).

Maintaining a balance between your patient’s daily needs and your own responsibilities can be a challenge. You might have to create new routines to merge all of the new tasks with the old ones. Some things may just have to be put on hold. That’s OK.

Find YOUR support system

We focus our energies on supporting the AN patient in our life, but we need to build our own support system. Maintaining regular contact with friends and family is critical to being a successful caregiver.

Look out for your own health

We’re so worried about our AN patient we forget about taking care of ourselves. Don’t forget your own annual checkups and screenings. Eat well and get enough sleep.

Accept help from others

You don’t need to be a hero and be the sole support. If others can help, accept it. In fact, ask for it. People often want to help and just don’t know how. Just say “yes” and everyone will feel better.

Be aware of signs of depression

Caregiving can be stressful for you and you might not even realize how demanding it is. Seeing a helping professional will assist you in putting everything in perspective and get you through the tough times. It’s OK to ask for help for yourself. It is actually a good thing.

Ask questions

While it often doesn’t feel like it, there are many other caregivers with the same challenges you face.

Join in a discussion on the website ANA Discussion Forum; go to a Local Support Group meeting. You’ll be surprised what you’ll learn about how other people manage the new normal.

Give yourself some credit

You’re doing one of the toughest jobs there is. It’s OK to pat yourself on the back.

Being a caregiver requires caring for oneself as well as the AN patient in our lives. ANA is here to help and we look forward working together with you.