



Cancer Care Guide

How to support someone with Cancer

When a friend, loved one, or family member is diagnosed with cancer, a number of thoughts cross your mind. What is the 'right' thing to say? How can you help? Will your relationship change?

This post helps provide some clarity by outlining how you should approach these situations and how to genuinely support a person with cancer.

'Do'

- Respect their decisions about how their cancer will be treated, even if you disagree.
- Continue to treat them as normally as possible.
- Include the person in usual work, plans, and social events. Let them tell you if the commitment is too much to manage.
- **Be a good listener** but don't be offended if they do not want to talk about their illness with you.
- Listen without always thinking that you have to respond. Sometimes all a person needs is for someone to listen.
- Offer to help in concrete, specific ways.

'Don't'

- Offer unwanted advice or be judgmental.
- Assume the person will be less social or able to work – they need to feel like a valuable, contributing member of the group.
- Take things personally. It is normal for the person to be quieter, to need more alone time, or to be angry at times.
- Be afraid to talk about the illness.

Caring for someone with Cancer

Dealing with emotional changes

A cancer diagnosis elicits a number of emotional reactions in a person that fluctuate regularly, from anger to sadness to fear. Some days are better than others and this is completely normal. As a family member or friend, you should try to support the person through these mood swings and do your best to make the bad days as good as they can be.



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Learning to live with uncertainty

This is crucial as it helps in learning to live with cancer, for both the person with cancer and for the people around them. Encourage them to join a support group if you feel they need others that they can relate to and speak with openly about what they are going through. Further, support their coping mechanisms which can range from humor to isolation.

Being there for them

Cancer is increasingly being treated in the outpatient setting, people no longer have to stay in the hospital. During this time they need support and encouragement. [Numerous studies](#) have found that cancer patients with strong emotional support are better able to adjust to changes and are more optimistic.

Treating them the same

Talk about things other than cancer, your friend/family member will understandably need a break. Try not to let their condition get in the way of your relationship. Make plans with them but be flexible.

Being thoughtful

Think carefully when taking the person gifts or food. They may have to stick to a specific diet, may be extremely nauseous or may not be able to eat things they once loved.

Further, people diagnosed with cancer are constantly bombarded with warrior imagery, says [Jenn McRobbie, a breast cancer survivor](#) and author. “We’re called ‘fighters,’ ‘warriors,’ and we’re told to ‘win the battle.’ This imagery may help some people feel more in control of their experience, but it can also make you feel like you’re doing it all wrong if you’re having a bad day.” She adds, avoid commenting on physical appearances, cancer patients are highly aware and conscious of these changes and do not need them pointed out

Continue to offer support after the initial diagnosis, help them without overwhelming them. Be specific about the help you can offer them. For instance, help them or their caregivers with errands or tasks. It is best to add “feel free to take me up on this offer whenever” when offering help so they know you will be there whenever they need you (in a week, a month, or a year).



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Keeping in touch

Send brief, frequent texts, or make short, regular calls. Ask questions. Check in regularly. Return their messages right away. Check in with their caregiver to find out how they are doing.

Cancer can be very isolating, visit them as much as you can within their schedule. Shorter, regular visits are ideal as the person can look forward to them.

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