

How to Be a Friend to Someone With Cancer



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Friendship and cancer

Many studies have found that people with cancer who have strong emotional support tend to better adjust to the changes cancer brings to their lives, have a more positive outlook, and often report a better quality of life. Research has shown that they need support from friends. You can make a big difference in the life of someone with cancer.

Friends of people with cancer often want to help, but don't know what to do.

As you spend time with your friend and learn more about how cancer is affecting their everyday life, keep your eyes open for other things you can offer. See how your friend responds to different activities, and know that the situation may change as treatment goes on. Tailoring your help to what they need and enjoy most is the best way to be a friend. Here we will give you some ideas about where to start.

What you can do: Notes and phone calls

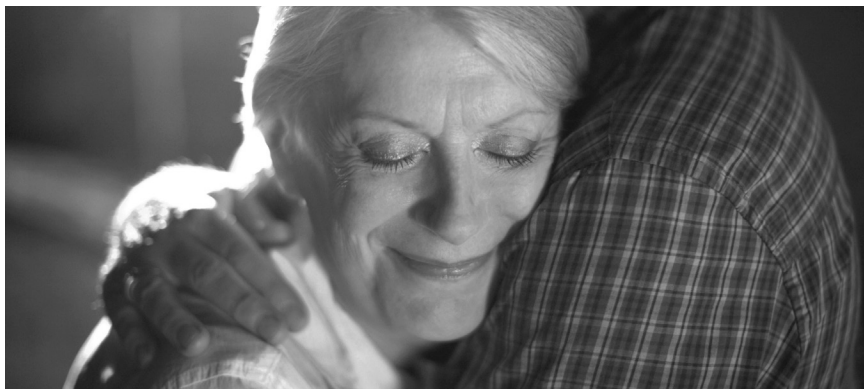
Make sure your friend knows that they're important to you. Show that you still care for your friend despite changes in what they can do or how they look.

- Send brief, frequent notes or texts, or make short, regular calls. Include photos, silly cards, kids' drawings, and cartoons.
- Ask questions.
- Return their messages right away.
- Check in with the person who helps with their daily care (caregiver) to see what else they might need.

What you can do: Visits

Cancer can be very isolating. Try to spend time with your friend. You may be a welcome distraction and help them feel like they did before cancer became a major focus of their life.

- Always call before you visit. Be understanding if your friend can't see you at that time.



Don't be afraid to touch, hug, or shake hands with your friend.

- Schedule a visit that allows you to give physical and emotional support for the caregiver, too. Maybe you can arrange to stay with your friend while the caregiver gets out of the house for a couple of hours.
- Make short, regular visits rather than long, infrequent ones. Understand that your friend might not want to talk, but they may not like being alone either.
- Offer to bring a snack or treat to share so your visit doesn't impose on the caregiver.
- Share music your friend enjoys, watch their favorite TV show, or watch a movie with them.

What you can do: Conversation

Many people worry that they don't know what to say to someone with cancer. Try to remember that the most important thing is not what you say – it's that you're there and willing to listen. Try to hear and understand how your friend feels.

- Ask your friend if they're having any discomfort. Suggest new ways to be more comfortable, such as using more pillows or moving the furniture.
- Give honest compliments, such as "You look rested today."
- Support your friend's feelings. Allow them to be negative, withdrawn, or silent. Resist the urge to change the subject.
- Be sure to include your friend when talking to others in the room.

Ask your friend questions. Ask for their advice and opinions.

- Assume that your friend can hear you even if they seem to be asleep or dazed.
- Don't offer medical advice.

What you can do: Errands and projects

Many people want to help friends facing a difficult time. Keep in mind that wanting to help and offering to be there for your friend is what matters most.

- Run an errand for the caregiver; it's as helpful as an errand for your friend.
- Look for ways to help on a regular basis.
- Make lunch for your friend and their caregiver one day a week. If your friend is getting chemo, ask what they feel like eating.
- Buy groceries.
- Go to the post office.
- Pick up prescriptions.
- Drive family or friends to and from the airport or hotel.

What you can do: Gifts

Look for small, practical things your friend may need or just enjoy. Think about what their average day is like and what might make it a little better. It's always good to laugh and smile, too, so look for fun things for your friend.

- Make sure gifts are useful right away. Small gifts given frequently are usually better than large, one-time gifts.
- Give a gift to the caregiver; it's as welcome as a gift to your friend.

Suggested ideas:

- Soft or silly socks
- Fun hats or scarves
- Bright, soft washcloths, towels, or sheets
- Silk or satin pillowcases
- Self-care items, such as a cancer resource book, a special pillow, or a heating pad
- A massage device
- Pictures of friends
- Funny movies
- Audio books
- Journal or notebook

Everyone, no matter how strong, can benefit from having a friend. Your friend with cancer needs you and your support.



It can be hard to know what to say or do when someone you care about has cancer. Here we share some tips to help you give your friend the support and encouragement they need.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, visit **www.cancer.org** or call **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345



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