

How to Support Someone With Cancer

Supporting someone with cancer is mostly about steady presence and practical help, led by what they want. Small, specific acts — a meal, a ride, a check-in text — often matter more than grand gestures.

The simple version

Supporting someone with cancer isn't about having the right answers. It's about steady presence and practical help, guided by what they actually want. Small, specific acts of care usually mean more than grand gestures.

Emotional support

Often the most valuable thing is simply being there. Listen without trying to fix things. Let them set the pace. Remind them they're not alone. A short 'thinking of you' text, with no pressure to reply, can brighten a hard day.

Practical help

Taking a real task off their plate lifts a genuine burden. Concrete offers work best:

- Dropping off a meal, or setting up a meal schedule.
- Rides to and from appointments.
- Errands, groceries, or prescription pickups.
- Childcare, pet care, or help around the house.

Keep them in control

Cancer takes away a lot of control, so it helps to give some back. Offer choices instead of deciding for them. Respect their answers, including 'not today.' Support should feel like an open hand, never pressure.

Let the person lead — offer options and follow their choices.

Don't forget the caregivers

The people doing day-to-day caregiving carry a heavy load, and they are easy to overlook. Offer them a meal, a break, or simply a check-in. That supports the whole household. This page is

educational information, not medical advice. Encourage the family to lean on their care team and support services.

When to get help sooner

Being close to someone means you may notice trouble first. Speak up rather than waiting.

- **Call or text 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), or call 911, if** the person talks about ending their life, says others would be better off without them, or seems to be planning to harm themselves.
- **Call 911 or go to an emergency department if** they suddenly cannot breathe, have chest pain, faint, have a seizure, become confused, or cannot be woken. Do not drive yourself.
- **Help them phone their cancer team immediately, day or night, if** they have a temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher during chemotherapy or any other treatment that lowers blood counts. The CDC treats this as a medical emergency: fever can be the only sign of a serious infection. If the team cannot be reached quickly, take them to an emergency department and say straight away that they are having chemotherapy.
- **Help them call their care team right away if** they have stopped eating or drinking. For emergencies call 911 or go to the ER.
- **Urge them to call within a day or two if** low mood, hopelessness, or heavy anxiety has lasted more than two weeks, or they have stopped going to appointments.

One more thing: do not suggest treatments, supplements, or diets. Even well-meant advice can interfere with treatment. Point back to the care team instead.

Sources

- [National Cancer Institute — Support for Caregivers of Cancer Patients](https://cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/caregiver-support) (cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/caregiver-support)
- [National Cancer Institute — When Someone You Love Is Being Treated for Cancer](https://cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/when-someone-you-love-is-being-treated) (cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/when-someone-you-love-is-being-treated)
- [CDC — Watch Out for Fever \(Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients\)](https://cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/fever.html) (cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/fever.html)
- [NIMH — Depression](https://nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression) (nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression)

Source: National Cancer Institute (cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/caregiver-support)

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