

Helping A Loved One Through Cancer Treatment



[Image Courtesy Pexels](#)

A diagnosis of cancer is traumatic for everyone involved. When someone you love gets the bad news, it can be difficult to know what to do. You want to help, but you may have no idea where to begin, or how to give them what they need. Expressions of sympathy and offers of assistance can all seem so hollow, when someone you love is dealing with a medical crisis. But a strong social and emotional support network can make a [big difference](#) in the progression of the disease.

Be There

Just your presence can help give your loved one the strength to keep fighting. A visit will lift their spirits. If they're up to it, consider taking them for a movie, a walk, or a meal. Practice active listening, because they're going to need to talk about their experiences and their fears. Help to distract them from their ordeal by creating happy memories together. If they are religious, let them know you're praying for them. [Studies](#) show that people who have other people praying for them heal more quickly and have better health outcomes than those who do not.

Take an Active Role

Researching the patient's condition can help you have a better understanding of what they're going through and will help encourage productive conversation. But don't focus solely on their [illness](#); make time to talk about other aspects of their lives. A cancer diagnosis and treatment

can be overwhelming, so it can be comforting to focus on something else for a change. Take your cue from your loved one, in regard to what they need to discuss. Don't just say, "Let me know if I can do anything." Do something without waiting to be asked. Bring over some groceries, run a load of laundry, offer to pick the kids up from school. Cancer treatment is exhausting, and your loved one may have days where they can't find the energy to even get out of bed. Take some of the load off their shoulders by pitching in with the daily tasks of life. Offer to brush their hair, or help them dress. Clean their kitchen. Whatever you can do to minimize their responsibilities will help them devote more energy to getting well.

Follow Their Lead

Let your loved one [dictate](#) how and when you'll visit; just make sure they know that you want to. It's possible that sometimes, they won't feel like it, and that's OK. Try again for a better day. In the meantime, let them know you're thinking about them. Send affectionate notes or little [gifts](#) to brighten their day. Allow them to be sad and express unhappy or uncomfortable feelings and thoughts.

Plan for the Future

Making [plans for the future](#) reinforces that you think there will be one, so don't be afraid to talk about what you want to do together when the patient recovers. Maintain an optimistic frame of mind. Be flexible about visiting and plans you make, in case they need to reschedule. If your loved one is willing, offer to accompany them to appointments and be a "treatment buddy."

Encourage Others

If you can, become a point person for your social circle. Help to facilitate other visits and get-togethers. Put together a prayer circle at church, and organize group outings. Help enlist friends to assist with meal deliveries and errands. Burdens shared are burdens lightened, so spread the load among the people who care and want to help.

Create a Personal Relaxation Space

Help your loved one to create a private [meditation space](#) in their home so they can get the benefits of relaxation. Help them choose soothing music to play, comfortable furnishings, and uplifting decor. If it is safe to use in the home, candle meditation can be a soothing focus. Evidence [shows](#) that meditation and yoga can improve the health of cancer patients at a cellular level, increasing the lengths of their telomeres and helping to protect them from disease. If your loved one isn't well enough to meditate, encourage them to do some stretches to [alleviate tension](#). Simple stretches like neck rolls, chin tucks, and calf raises can improve your loved one's mood and energy levels, increase circulation, and reduce pain and stiffness.

Whatever you do, don't allow your loved one to drift away from you. Even if they seem to want to isolate during their treatment, keep trying to reach out to them. Be patient and remember that they are dealing with a unique challenge. Their personality may change; they may become angry, sullen or withdrawn. The medications may have side effects and cause them to become forgetful or to lash out emotionally. Remind yourself that when they say or do something hurtful, it's because they are hurting. It's not about you -- it's about the cancer. Stand by them and continue showing them how much you love them. Build them up, so they can fight their way back to health.