



Coping With Cancer in Everyday Life

Nearly 14.5 million Americans alive today have faced a diagnosis of cancer. Some of them have just been diagnosed or are going through treatment, while others no longer have active symptoms of cancer or are thought to be cured.

No 2 people with cancer are alike – just as no 2 friends or family members are alike. Everyone has their own way of coping with cancer. Here we will review how some people facing cancer have dealt with their feelings and their individual situations. This information comes from many people who have shared their thoughts and feelings about coping with cancer. They've shared because they believe it's helpful to hear from others who have been in their shoes.

The American Cancer Society can give you information about different types of cancer and many cancer-related topics. At the end of this document, we've listed some resources that cover other topics in depth. We also offer many patient services in communities throughout the country. To get the information and resources you need, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345, or visit our website at www.cancer.org.

The emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis

Delores, cancer survivor: *“There’s a fear that goes through you when you are told you have cancer. It’s so hard in the beginning to think about anything but your diagnosis. It’s the first thing you think about every morning. I want people diagnosed with cancer to know it does get better. Talking about your cancer helps you deal with all of the new emotions you are feeling. Remember, it’s normal to get upset.”*

A cancer diagnosis affects not only you, but also your family and friends. You may feel scared, uncertain, or angry about the unwanted changes cancer will bring to your life and theirs. You may feel numb or confused. You may have trouble listening to, understanding, or remembering what people tell you during this time. This is especially true when your doctor first tells you that you have cancer. It's not uncommon for people to shut down mentally once they hear the word “cancer.”

There's nothing fair about cancer and no one deserves it. A cancer diagnosis is hard to take and having cancer is not easy. When you find out you have cancer, your personal beliefs and experiences help you figure out what it means to you and how you will handle it. As you face your own mortality and cope with the many demands of cancer, you may look more closely at your

religious beliefs, your personal and family values, and what's most important in your life. Accepting the diagnosis and figuring out what cancer will mean in your life is challenging.

After you are diagnosed with cancer, you may feel shock, disbelief, fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness, grief, depression, anger, and more. Each person may have some or all of these feelings, and each will handle them in a different way.

Your first emotion might be shock – no one is ever ready to hear that they have cancer. It's normal for people with cancer to wonder why it happened to them or to think life has treated them unfairly. You may not even believe the diagnosis, especially if you don't feel sick.

You might feel afraid. Some people fear cancer itself, while others may be afraid of cancer treatments and wonder how they'll get through them. The fear of pain and suffering is one of the greatest fears people with cancer and their loved ones have.

You might feel guilty. You may ask yourself if you could have noticed your symptoms earlier, or wonder what you did that may have caused the cancer. You may wonder if you were exposed to something at home or work that led to cancer. Or you may worry that other members of your family will get cancer, too. At this time we do not know what causes most cancers. But a few are known to be hereditary (passed from a parent to a child). This means if one family member develops it, others in the family may have a higher risk of developing it. This can cause even more concerns for the person newly diagnosed with cancer.

You might feel hopeless or sad if you see cancer as a roadblock to a life full of health and happiness. It's hard to feel positive and upbeat, especially if the future is uncertain. Just thinking about treatment and the time it will take out of your life can seem like too much to handle. Feelings of sadness or uncertainty may be made worse by your past experiences with cancer.

You might have a sense of loss linked to your cancer diagnosis and treatment. Cancer can change your sense of self, that is, how you think of your body, yourself, and your future. Grief is a normal response as you give up your old ideas of yourself and begin to develop ways to cope with the new, unwanted changes in your life. It might take time for you to become aware of these losses and changes. It can help to share your grief with someone close to you. If there's no one near you that you want to confide in, you might want to see a mental health professional. Your feelings need care too, just like your physical body needs care.

You might feel angry. While some people may not outwardly express their anger and frustration, others may direct their anger toward family members, friends, or health care professionals. This is usually not done on purpose. If you're only trying to vent your feelings, let people know that you are not angry with them and it's not their fault. Also let them know that you don't expect them to solve your problems – you just need them to listen.

Coping with your emotions

The best prescription is knowledge.

– C. Everett Koop, MD, former US Surgeon General

Some people find that it's easier for them to face the reality of something new or scary if they learn as much as they can about it. This is especially true when you are dealing with a complex disease like cancer. There's often a great fear of the unknown and uncertainty about what's going to happen. Knowledge can help lessen the fear of the unknown. You can learn a lot about the type of cancer you have, its treatment, and what you can expect.

Be your own advocate. Even though people facing cancer cannot change their diagnosis, they can seek reliable, up-to-date information and talk to family members, friends, and their health care team. Finding good sources of support can help people with cancer take control of their situation and make informed decisions.

It's important to work through your feelings about cancer, because how you feel can affect how you look at yourself, how you view life, and the decisions you make about treatment.

These tips can help you make your medical appointments as useful as possible:

- Make a list of questions to ask your health care team.
- Bring a family member or friend with you. They can serve as an extra pair of ears, help you remember things later, and give you support.
- Ask if you can record important conversations.
- Take notes. If someone uses a word you don't know, ask them to spell it and explain it.
- Ask your health care team to explain anything you don't understand.

You aren't able to change many things in your life. Focus on what you *can* change to gain a greater sense of control over your situation.

Delores, cancer survivor: *“Daily walks and, later, running helped me keep my sanity after I was diagnosed.”*

Other things you can do to help deal with your emotions:

- Ask for support from family, friends, and others. Just having someone who cares and will listen to you can be very helpful. If friends or family members are not able to give you the support you need, find others who will. Health care professionals (such as social workers, psychologists, or other licensed health professionals) and support groups can be extra sources of support.
- Get spiritual support through prayer, meditation, or other practices that help you feel more at peace. You may want the guidance of a chaplain, pastor, rabbi, or other religious leader.
- Pay attention to your physical needs for rest, nutrition, and other self-care measures.
- Find ways to express your feelings, such as talking, music, painting, or writing.
- Allow yourself private time and space.

- Walk or exercise. Be sure to talk with your cancer care team about your plans before starting a new exercise program or activity.
- Find out what helped other patients and families cope with cancer, and/or talk with other people diagnosed with the same type of cancer.
- Make changes at home to create a healthier environment; talk with your doctor about making healthy lifestyle choices.

Feeling sad all the time, having trouble sleeping, or thinking about suicide are signs that you need professional help. Other signs that you might need help include feelings of panic, intense anxiety, or constant crying. If you think you might need professional help, talk with your doctor or nurse.

Making informed treatment decisions

Is there time?

People with cancer often feel the sooner they get rid of the cancer, the better. They may feel like they need to make decisions and start treatment right away. They may worry that extra tests and appointments with other doctors will take time that could be spent treating the cancer.

So how long is too long? Cancers grow at different rates. Most cancers do not grow very quickly, so there's usually time to gather information, talk with specialists, and make decisions about which treatment is best for you. Talk with your health care team if you are concerned about not starting treatment right away.

Cheng, cancer survivor: *“What was helpful for me was taking the time to step back and see the big picture. Getting information and the answers to my questions allowed me to make the best decision for me and my family. I lived up to my expectations and desires. I did things that made me feel comfortable, not what others thought I needed to do to be comfortable.”*

Getting cancer information

When you're looking for information about any type of cancer, you first need to know exactly what type of cancer you have. Talk with your health care team. Ask them for information about your specific type of cancer, including the cell type and the stage (extent) of your cancer. Your cancer treatment will be planned for just you, and knowing these specifics will help you find the best information for your situation.

The stage and type of cancer, along with other factors, will help determine the goal of treatment. Most types of cancer treatment have 1 of these 3 goals:

- Cure the cancer
- Control the cancer
- Ease symptoms of the cancer and help make the patient comfortable

Sometimes the treatment goal changes after treatment has started. Talk with your doctor. Make sure you understand what your treatment options are and what the goals are. This helps you make the best decisions for you and your family.

We live in an information-packed age. Cancer information can be complex and confusing. To find accurate and up-to-date information, use reliable sources, such as journals or websites from well-respected cancer centers, national cancer organizations, health professional organizations, and government agencies like the National Cancer Institute. (See the “To learn more” section for some suggestions.) The information from websites, message boards, and online support groups can be very helpful, but it varies widely in quality and accuracy. (See *Cancer Information on the Internet* for more on this.)

Look for information that has been reviewed by medical experts, is updated often, and states the purpose of the information. When you get information, discuss it with your health care team to find out if and how it applies to you. Remember that general information cannot take the place of medical advice from your doctor or cancer care team.

Getting information from your health care team

The first step your health care team will take is to learn all they can about you and your cancer. A biopsy and other lab tests, physical exams, and imaging tests will be done to figure out the stage (extent) of your cancer. Next, your doctor uses all of this information to narrow down options and recommend treatment. Your doctor may talk with other doctors and health care professionals to help plan your treatment. You may also wish to get a second opinion at another treatment center. Getting a second opinion may help you feel more comfortable when deciding on your best treatment option.

Talking to doctors, nurses, and other members of the health care team is very important for people diagnosed with cancer. Your health care team can tell you where to look for information about your type of cancer and its treatment. They can answer your questions, give you support, and refer you to community resources. Allow yourself to take in information at your own pace. You decide when you are ready to talk, when you want to learn more, and how much you want to learn.

See *Talking With Your Doctor* for tips that can help make it easier to talk with your doctor and other members of your health care team.

Ask questions

Doctors and nurses are good sources of information when you have medical questions. Before appointments, write down any questions you may have about things like your type of cancer, treatment, side effects, and limits on activity you might have during treatment. Other members of your health care team, like pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, physical therapists, and radiation therapists are experts in different areas. Don't be afraid to ask them questions, too.

Asking questions shows you want to learn and take an active role in your treatment. If a health care team member doesn't have time to answer all of your questions, ask when a good time would be to finish your conversation or ask about other ways to get the answers you need.

You can find lists of questions to ask your doctor on our website, or call us to have them sent to you.

Judith, caregiver for her husband: *“No question is too small or too silly to ask. I never was afraid to call the doctor or staff with questions about anything...even questions about our bills and insurance. I found that our doctor and his staff were willing to answer any question. It was also very helpful to speak with our pharmacist. He made special arrangements when we needed to get prescriptions, especially pain medicine, filled after regular business hours.”*

Know how to reach your doctor any time

People with cancer must know when they need to call the doctor. Ask which side effects or unusual problems need to be reported right away. Some things can wait until the next office visit, or until regular office hours when you can call and speak to a nurse. But if you're having severe or unexpected side effects, you need to know how to reach a doctor when the office is closed. Be sure you have this phone number and that your loved ones have it, too. If your doctor isn't available after hours, find out what you should do if you have problems.

Family members may also wish to speak with members of your health care team. This can help them get answers to their questions and find support to deal with their feelings. Your health care team is bound by law to keep information about your health confidential. They will not discuss your health with family members and friends unless you give your permission for them to do so. Let your doctors and nurses know which family members and friends may be contacting them and with whom they can share information. You may have to sign forms giving your permission for these discussions.

Feel comfortable with your health care team

In an ideal world all health care professionals would be patient, understanding, have all the time in the world to answer questions, and know how to explain things to you so you could easily understand. But finding all of this in one person is rare. Still, it's important for you to trust your doctor and other members of the health care team. If you feel a lack of trust and open communication is keeping you from getting good medical care, ask for a referral to another doctor with whom you feel more comfortable. Also, don't be afraid to ask your doctor for a referral for a second opinion. You need to be an active member of your health care team. As an active team member, you will need to do things like keep your scheduled appointments, take medicines as prescribed, and report side effects.

Telling your family and friends

People who have been told they have cancer may wonder whom to tell and how they should tell them. They often feel pressured to share their diagnosis, but most people are able to wait until they are ready. There's no set time when people begin to feel comfortable enough to discuss their cancer with others. It's different for each person.

Delores, cancer survivor: *“Telling friends and family was really hard. Since my mother had died from breast cancer it felt like I was saying, ‘Here we go again.’ My sister-in-law had died from lung cancer the same month I was diagnosed with breast cancer. This made*

it hard to tell my husband's family that cancer had struck again. I was sad for my husband."

If you have been diagnosed with cancer, only you know the right time and the right words to use to tell your family and friends. You may find that sharing the news of what you're facing leads you to people who become key sources of support and encouragement. Sharing with loved ones gives them a chance to offer their support. Your honesty and openness can help open new lines of communication and make relationships stronger and better.

It's very hard to hide a diagnosis of cancer. Friends and family might suspect you have cancer when they become aware of symptoms or different types of tests you've had. Often when people don't know what's going on, they imagine the worst possible situation. But when you do share the news, they may still be stunned and not know how to react or what to say.

Before you talk to others about your illness, think about your own feelings, your reasons for telling others, and what you expect of them. Be ready for a wide range of reactions. When you share information about your diagnosis, your family and friends will have many different feelings, too. They also need time to adjust. They might be able to express their feelings to you, or they may try to hide them.

Delores, cancer survivor: *"The first time you say, 'I have cancer' out loud is the most difficult. The more you say it, the easier it gets to say the words. The more I talked about my diagnosis of breast cancer, the easier it was for me to accept what I was going through. Sometimes I thought it was ironic that I felt like I was the one who was cheering up the recipients of my news."*

For more on this, please see *Talking With Friends and Relatives About Your Cancer*.

Other people's reactions

Each person reacts and copes differently when they learn someone they care about has been diagnosed with cancer. You may find that family members and friends are ready to talk about the cancer before you are. But no one should rush you. Simply thank them for their concern, and tell them you're not ready to talk about it yet.

Some family members or friends may feel uncomfortable talking about cancer. You may notice changes in how people act around you after you tell them the news. People may feel uncomfortable because they don't know what to say or how to act. Not everyone has faced cancer before, and even those who have might not know anything about the kind of cancer you have or its treatment. Some friends may act awkward and distant, while others will continue to be themselves. Some may even seem to be too nosy or overly helpful. It will take time for all of you to adjust to cancer and get more comfortable talking about it. With time, most people are able to share understanding, compassion, and friendship. Giving your loved ones information and a chance to ask questions can help as you work through this time together.

If someone's reaction disturbs you, try to talk with them about it. Explain exactly what type of response is most helpful to you. Don't be afraid to tell people about what's happening with you. Teach them. Explain what kind of cancer you have and the treatments you'll need. Tell them that cancer is not a death sentence, nor is it something they can "catch." The best thing you can do for each other is be honest about your feelings. Once these feelings are shared, most people find it easier to talk about hopes and plans for the future.

Cheng, cancer survivor: *"I simply told my family this was not going to be a deathbed watch. I was in this for the fight no matter what and expected their full support and understanding. I think their active involvement and full inclusion in what was going on was what helped my family cope with the experience."*

After sharing the news of your diagnosis, family and friends may offer practical help such as helping out with household chores, cooking, child care, or shopping. Friends might call to see how you are and ask if there's anything they can do to help. Try to take them up on these offers if you could use some help – they are asking for a job to do, and for direction. But they need to know how best to help. Some patients keep a list of things they need help with by the telephone. Then when someone offers, they can tell them exactly what they need.

If you enjoyed walking or going to movies with friends before your cancer diagnosis, remind your friends that you still enjoy those things. But don't be afraid to tell them when you don't feel up to talking or other activities. If you want them to ask again later, tell them that, and ask them to keep inviting you. A lot of people will be happy to do that for you. Let them know it feels good to be asked – even on the days you're not up to it.

Marisol, cancer survivor: *"I was in a daze a lot of the time. Just dealing with the possibility of my own death was a lot, so I relied on friends to give people updates and concentrated on my immediate family."*

Telling your children

Judith, caregiver: *"I wish I had been more open with my children instead of trying to protect them. I think I could have prevented some of the acting out behaviors that I saw. I think they needed to be more involved to help both themselves and me."*

Children and teens need to understand and be involved to the degree they can, based on their age and coping skills. Talking with them about cancer is very important. Children need to know that their families are there for support, and they can count on their families to be honest with them. Children should be encouraged to talk about their feelings. Some parents who tried to spare their children from knowing the truth later regretted not discussing things more openly during the course of the illness.

Why tell your children about a cancer diagnosis?

When families choose to hide information about cancer, children may still pick up on the tension and stress. As a result, they may suspect something is being hidden from them. Children may listen in on adult conversations to get information. Or they may just hear bits and pieces, or things that they were not intended to hear. They may not understand what they hear but will still know that something is wrong.

Wendy experienced cancer in her family as a child: *“My dad did not want to tell my older sister or me that he had cancer. Even though I didn’t know he had cancer, I definitely noticed the changes in our house. I remember he had blue and purple marks on his neck and chest (for radiation treatments) and a catheter in his chest. His skin was pale, his hair fell out, and his usual round belly disappeared. My mom and I made a lot of trips to our local pharmacy and it seemed like he was always taking medicine.”*

It’s normal for children to see the world only as it relates to them. And it’s common for children to think something they said or did caused the cancer. Be aware of this and talk about it with the child when he or she learns about cancer in a loved one.

Cancer is usually not something children understand or have experienced. They tend to understand concrete information and oversimplify, so children may not realize there are many types of cancer, that each person’s cancer is different, and that having cancer does not mean the person will soon die. They get information and ideas from other children and what they see in everyday life, including what they see on TV. Without the right information, children may fill in gaps with their imagination – and many times what they imagine is far worse than reality.

How to talk to children about cancer

Parents often struggle with what to tell their children when they are diagnosed with cancer. How much they need to know and can handle depend on the child’s age and maturity level. Give children small amounts of information at a time, in words they can understand. Then give them time to take in the information and a chance to ask questions.

Ask them if they have heard any words that they don’t understand or find scary. Listen to their concerns. Help them express their feelings and reassure them of your love. It’s often easier for younger children to show their feelings using activities, such as puppets or painting. Older children might prefer writing poetry or drawing.

Peter, caregiver for his wife: *“Telling your children is the hardest part. It’s important that you think through what you’re going to say – the words and emotions will have a significant impact on how they’ll react. The calmer you are, the less frightened they’ll be. My wife and I told our kids (our son was 15 and our daughter was 11) at the end of a Christmas ski vacation.*

By that time, we had made arrangements to get a second opinion at a top cancer center, had dealt with necessary legal papers, and had talked with our closest friends. We calmly

told the kids, in easy to understand words, what the first doctors had told us and that in a few days we were going to Texas for more tests. As calm as we were, the revelation of cancer was a huge shock to our kids and was met with fear and tears. It's essential that kids are reassured that their parents are going to do everything possible in the way of treatment, that they are still deeply loved and always will be, and if necessary, assured none of this is their fault."

What to say about cancer

Adults can tell children what's going on in just a few sentences. "My doctor told me I am sick with cancer. The doctor is going to do what he/she can to make me better. I'll have to go to the doctor a lot to get a special kind of medicine so I might not be able to spend as much time with you. Sometimes the medicine might make me feel bad so I might not feel like playing much, but I'll still be here. I want you to know how much I love you."

If the person with cancer does not feel comfortable telling a child about it, a close relative or friend might be able to explain things to the child. This often depends on the relationship of the person with cancer to the child (for example aunt, grandparent, or parent).

Keep life as normal as possible

Children might have problems coping with cancer in a loved one for many reasons. The person with cancer might be getting treatment at a hospital far away from home, or they may be recovering at home and be sick or look different. Children may also be asked to help out more or be on their best behavior, especially if people other than their parents are helping to care for them. They may question or even resent any loss of attention. Keeping the child's life as normal as possible is important during this time of change.

If friends or other family members want to help out, getting your children to school or to other activities when you can't is a great way to do so. This can help keep your children's normal routines.

Younger children may focus on death. Children often worry who will take care of them if something happens to their parent, and need to know about any plans that have been made. Older children and teens who are becoming more independent must deal with the changes taking place in their everyday life, and also the possibility of long-term separation or even the death of someone they love.

Although it's important to try to maintain a normal routine and lifestyle for children, they also need to be included as part of a family that is fighting cancer. Children may ask to see where treatment will be given and may ask questions about any changes they notice in the person with cancer.

Peter, caregiver for his wife: *"My wife and I tried to help our kids by trying to keep as normal a routine as possible. When you have new information or when they ask questions, discuss the illness in language that they can understand. Frequently reassure them of your love and that they will always be loved and cared for. Involve them in helpful activities, like*

selecting a wig! Perhaps most important, enroll the kids in a local support group for kids whose parents have cancer. The sharing of experiences with the help of professionals worked wonders in helping our kids cope.”

Many children try to act like adults so life will be easier for their parents. A support group for children might give them a safe place to air their frustrations. Hospital social workers, nurses, psychologists, clergy members, and school counselors are good resources to ask about support groups in your area.

For more information about how to talk with children about cancer and a list of reading materials for parents and children, see the “To learn more” section at the end of this document.

For the person who has cancer

People facing cancer often find themselves facing the possibility of their own death. At first, some people focus on dying from cancer instead of living with cancer. As one woman explained, just after she was diagnosed with lung cancer she isolated herself from her family and spent a lot of time alone in her room. Before long, she realized the cancer wasn’t going to go away on its own. She decided that she could either keep pulling the covers over her head or she could tackle cancer the way she did other challenges. This adjustment in thinking takes time.

Cheng, cancer survivor: *“It’s very easy to get absorbed in a sterile system of tests, procedures, and treatments and lose your individual perspective. Always remember your humanity, allowing yourself the feelings and emotions that are you. By doing this, you will make life-changing self-discoveries that you were never aware of. These discoveries will bring some understanding of the experience, motivation to face the most difficult challenges, and inspiration to others who will marvel at your never-before-seen spirit and character.”*

Taking care of yourself

With the stress cancer causes, it’s important that you take care of yourself – the whole person – not just the cancer. Some people want to become more “in tune” with themselves, or just do things that take their mind off the disease. Do what you need to do. Physical activities such as walking, dancing, and yoga can improve your sense of well-being and make you more aware of your body. Poetry, music, drawing, and reading are also creative ways to express yourself and keep your mind off cancer. Meditation and relaxation training can help with anxiety and symptom control. Taking on a new and challenging activity can give you a sense of accomplishment, and can help reduce stress, too.

Let your doctor know if you are thinking about trying an alternative or unproven treatment. There are many herbs, supplements, or treatments that claim to cure or treat cancer. Some of these are harmless, while others clearly have been shown to be harmful. Also know that some of these treatments can interact with other medicines you may be taking and can cause unexpected effects. Talk to your health care team before starting anything new.

Marisol, cancer survivor: *“I had 6 months of chemotherapy and during that time I tried to keep my life as stress-free and as normal as possible. I also took a ballet class during treatment. It was good exercise, I made new friends, and it really kept my mind off cancer.”*

Taking care of yourself also means accepting help from others. When a person is diagnosed with cancer, he or she may need to ask for and accept help for the first time ever. This can include help from friends and family or outside help. Asking for help doesn't mean you are weak. Arranging transportation to and from treatment, getting medical equipment to use at home, hiring a home health aide, or finding someone to watch the children while you're getting treatments are just a few of the many tasks that may need to be done. Handling all of these changes along with your regular responsibilities can be stressful. To manage well, most people need help.

How can I relieve stress and relax?

Simple techniques can help you cope with stress and help you relax. Try some of these methods to find the ones that work best for you. You may want to check with your doctor before using any of these, especially if you have lung problems.

Muscle tension and release

- Lie down in a quiet room.
- Take a slow, deep breath.
- As you breathe in, tense a muscle or group of muscles. For example, clench your teeth or stiffen your arms or legs.
- Keep your muscles tense for a second or 2 while holding your breath.
- Then breathe out, release the tension, and let your body relax completely.
- Repeat the process with another muscle or muscle group.

Another way to do this is called progressive relaxation. You work your way up your body starting with the toes of one foot. Contract then relax all the muscles of one leg. Do the same with the other leg. Work your way up your body, contracting then relaxing each of the muscle groups in your body, including those in your neck and face. Remember to hold your breath while briefly contracting your muscles and to breathe out when releasing the tension.

Rhythmic breathing

- Get into a comfortable position and relax all your muscles.
- Close your eyes or focus on a distant object if you prefer to keep them open.
- Breathe in and out slowly and comfortably through your nose. If you like, keep the rhythm steady by saying to yourself, “In, 1, 2. Out, 1, 2.”

- Feel yourself relax and go limp each time you breathe out.
- You can continue this for just a few seconds or for up to 10 minutes.

Biofeedback

With biofeedback training, you can control body functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension. A machine will sense and alert you when your body shows signs of tension. The machine will also give you feedback when you relax your body. With time and practice, you will learn to control your relaxation responses without having to depend on feedback from the machine. Your doctor or nurse can refer you to someone trained in teaching biofeedback.

Mental imagery

Imagery involves mental exercises designed to allow the mind to influence the health and well-being of the body.

- Close your eyes, breathe slowly, and feel yourself relax.
- Imagine a ball of healing energy – perhaps a white light – forming somewhere in your body.
- When you see the ball of energy, slowly breathe in and blow the ball to any part of the body where you feel pain, tension, or discomfort. When you breathe out, picture the air moving the ball away from your body, taking with it any painful or uncomfortable feelings. (Be sure to breathe naturally; don't blow.)
- Continue to picture the ball moving toward you and away from you each time you breathe in and out. You may see the ball getting bigger and bigger as it takes away more and more tension and discomfort.

Visualization

Visualization is much like imagery. With visualization, you create an inner picture that represents your fight against cancer. You might visualize rockets blasting away the cancer cells in your body or knights in armor battling the cells.

Hypnosis

Hypnosis puts you in a trance-like state that can help reduce discomfort and anxiety. You can be hypnotized by a qualified person, or you can learn how to hypnotize yourself. If you are interested in learning more, ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to someone trained in the technique.

Distraction

Distract yourself from your worries or discomforts by watching TV, listening to the radio, reading, going to the movies, or working with your hands by doing needlework or puzzles, building models, or painting. You may be surprised how comfortably the time passes.

Adjusting to changes in your body and self-image

Cancer and its treatment can cause physical changes. Some people feel insecure about how these changes affect their body and their self-image.

Surgery can change the way you look. Other treatments can affect how you feel. Side effects from cancer treatment, such as weight loss or weight gain, hair loss, and skin changes can also change the way you look. Fatigue can make it harder for you to care for your appearance.

The type of treatment, the drugs and their dosages, and the schedule of treatment all have an impact on the side effects you have. Just how bad the side effects are can vary from person to person. The same treatments may cause side effects in some people and not in others. Be sure to let your doctor and nurse know which side effects you have, if any, and how bad they are.

Your health care team can help manage side effects when they know how treatment is affecting you physically and emotionally. Ask your doctor what side effects you should expect and how long they're likely to last. Also, find out which side effects you need to report right away. You'll need to know how to get in touch with your doctor outside of regular office hours if needed.

Some people find it hard to be hopeful when their treatment makes them feel bad and look different. People with cancer can become frustrated when they do everything right but it doesn't help, or when treatment must be delayed because their body is unable to handle any more. Sometimes changes in your mood are caused by certain medicines, while other times they may be linked to the stress of coping with cancer and treatment. It's normal to have ups and downs during cancer treatment.

Body changes from cancer treatment can range from hair loss to the loss of a limb. These kinds of changes can be hard to handle because others can see them. Many people who lose hair choose to wear scarves, wigs, or hats. Some people choose artificial limbs (prostheses) and reconstructive surgery after cancer surgery. Both short- and long-term solutions like these draw less attention to or help hide a person's physical differences.

Sean, cancer survivor: *"I had 2 surgeries; the first to remove the cancerous testicle and the second to remove lymph nodes in my abdomen. The lymph node surgery affected how I feel about my body and self-image more than the first surgery. I'm more self-conscious about the scars on my abdomen. I was given the option of reconstruction of the testicle after my first surgery but I wasn't interested."*

When making difficult decisions, it often helps to talk with others who have had the same type of reconstructive surgery or wear the same type of prosthesis. Ask your surgeon if he or she is able to share photos that show actual results of reconstructive surgery.

Check with your health insurance company about coverage for reconstructive surgery or prostheses. Your hospital social worker may also be able to help you find ways to pay for it. Insurance coverage can be limited either by dollar amount or the number of prostheses (for example, mastectomy bras and breast forms) you can purchase in a certain amount of time.

Sexuality and cancer

Personal traits, such as a person's sense of humor, attitudes, honesty, and spirit, are a large part of what makes them attractive to their partner. Cancer treatment may seem to change these qualities, but the change is usually short-term. You are still the same partner, lover, and friend. It's important to remember those traits are still there, but for the moment may be overshadowed by the cancer experience.

Fertility and birth control

If you think you might want to have children later, it's very important to talk with your doctor about fertility and birth control issues **before** you start treatment. Many cancer treatments can result in infertility or sterility. For most people, there are ways to preserve their ability to have children, but it's best if this is done before starting therapy.

Keep in mind that even when sterility is a possible side effect of treatment, it's important to use an effective method of birth control. Even if the risk of pregnancy is very small, birth control must be used during, and for some time after, cancer treatment because many cancer treatments can harm a developing fetus. It's not safe to get pregnant during cancer treatment.

For more information about fertility, see our documents *Fertility and Women With Cancer* and *Fertility and Men With Cancer*.

Side effects can change your sex life

Side effects of cancer treatment can also affect a person's sexuality. Some side effects that can do this are fatigue, lack of desire, and feeling physically unattractive. Women may have vaginal dryness, and men may notice the inability to have or keep an erection. Physical side effects, such as fatigue and nausea, can decrease a person's desire for sex. Fear, anxiety, or depression can affect your sexuality, too. These side effects, like most other physical and emotional side effects, can often be managed or helped with treatment. Although you may feel embarrassed, it's important to talk to your doctor about them.

Try to let your partner know what's comfortable for you and when you feel up to sexual contact. Your partner may want to give you the space and time you need to adjust to changes in your body and self-image. Your partner may not want to rush you or seem to be insensitive, so it helps if you tell them about your desire for physical intimacy. Be specific about what you want. Over time, physical contact other than sex, such as hugging, kissing, and touching may help you express love and feel more comfortable about being close.

The effect of cancer on your relationship with your partner

Some people are afraid their partner will avoid physical contact with them. Others may fear their partner will leave them or find someone else. If there were problems in the relationship before a cancer diagnosis, they will still be there after the cancer diagnosis. Likewise, if a couple works through problems well, chances are good they will face this challenge in much the same way. When a couple communicates, they can usually work toward resolving their feelings and the added stress that cancer can place on a relationship.

Facing cancer as a couple can also strengthen a relationship. Cancer can help people realize what's really important to them. Priorities or problems they once saw as important may now seem less important or smaller.

Delores, cancer survivor: *“Cancer has a way of making you take an inventory of your life. It has made some good changes in my life. I think that my husband and I are closer as a result.”*

People who are not able to get support from their partners can find support elsewhere, such as through counseling, a support group, or friends. Counseling can help explore ways to improve communication and resolve problems in relationships. For those who are unable to work through these issues alone, professional counseling for individuals or couples is an option. Support groups that are offered by licensed or trained professionals may also be a source of practical advice and ideas about coping with changes in sexuality. Groups are available for people with cancer, for partners/spouses, and for couples.

For more information about sexuality, sex, and intimacy, see our documents *Sexuality for the Woman With Cancer* and *Sexuality for the Man With Cancer*.

For spouses, families, and friends

Telling a loved one he or she has cancer

Sometimes family members are the first to learn of a loved one's cancer diagnosis. How does a family decide if they should or when they should tell the person who has the cancer? Are some people too emotionally fragile, too young, or too old to know?

Most people can handle the news that they have cancer, but each person needs time to adjust and figure out what the diagnosis means to them.

If you are a family member trying to decide if you should tell a loved one they have cancer, consider this: you may think you are sparing them bad news, but they probably will sense something is wrong, especially if they start having a lot of tests done and/or don't feel well. The person with cancer may resent it when they find out family members kept the diagnosis a secret. Although you may think you are protecting them, your loved one might see this as dishonest.

When people with cancer are not told about their diagnosis, they are unable to make important decisions about their treatment and their life. There may be things they want to do, personal matters they want to take care of, or legal papers that may need to be updated. Even when a person has a cancer with a good chance for cure, they still need to discuss treatment options and goals, long-term treatment outcomes, and decisions about end-of-life care, including advance directives (living will and durable power of attorney for health care) with their doctors and their families.

Get the health care team's support and input in sharing this news with your loved one. It's their responsibility. They have experience with this and can make it easier on you.

The family's feelings about cancer

People usually need time to sort out feelings before they can be expressed and shared in the way they want. During this time, friends and family members may be the targets of their loved one's strong, overwhelming feelings that need to be vented.

If you are the target of anger and frustration, remember you're not the cause of this anger – you're a trusted person on whom the anger can be let out. Your loved one is angry about the cancer and how it has affected her or his life. And even though family members and friends usually try to respond with love and friendship, it's natural for them to feel their own anger and frustration, and sometimes express it, too.

Friends and families may also have a hard time adjusting to the cancer diagnosis. They may have to cope with increased responsibilities while trying to manage many different emotions. On top of this, they want to try to be sensitive to the needs of the person with cancer.

If you are close to the person with cancer, simply saying something like, "I'm here when you're ready to talk" will help keep the lines of communication open and offer them the chance to share this experience with you. Your presence is also a way to show your support. Don't be afraid to share your fears and worries with the person with cancer. Being honest about these feelings can allow everyone to work through difficult times together.

Talking with someone who has cancer

You may struggle to find the right words to say to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer. Know that there is no right way to act or perfect words to say. Just listening is often more helpful than anything you can say. Assuring them of your love and support is one of the most important things you can do. Most people with cancer do not want to face the experience alone and will need support from their family and friends. "I'm here for you" may be the best thing you can say to show your support.

Keep in mind that not everyone with cancer wants to talk about their feelings. They may have other ways to express their emotions, and some people just prefer to keep their feelings private. People with cancer might just want you to help them maintain their normal routine as much as possible. Just be yourself and continue to do things with them as you would if they didn't have cancer.

Sean, cancer survivor: *"I did not like to talk about my cancer with my friends or my family. I just wanted to get it over with. My oncologist had one of his patients who had been diagnosed with testicular cancer a few years ago call me. He had the same treatment I did and was my age so we could easily relate. He told me it would be a tough 6 months but I would get through it. Knowing that he made it through the same treatment was helpful."*

You can learn more about talking to and supporting someone with cancer in *Listen With Your Heart*, *How to Be a Friend to Someone With Cancer*, and *When Someone You Know Has Cancer*.

Changes in the family

A diagnosis of cancer changes a family forever. Figuring out what's for dinner or what your plans are for the weekend is suddenly less important. Family and personal values are questioned and priorities are tested and changed.

Unsettled feelings and arguments may resurface during a family's struggle with cancer. Often a family must sort out and revisit old, unresolved feelings before they can start to battle cancer together, as a family unit.

Cancer can cause role changes in the family, too. The head of the household may now be more dependent on other family members. Others may need to work outside the home or work different hours. When family members take on new roles, the way they interact within the family can change. New responsibilities may overwhelm some family members.

Parents might look to their children for support. If the children are old enough, they may be asked to take on more responsibilities within the household. These requests often come when children themselves need support. Children might start acting younger and less mature in response to the stress on the family. Teens, who are often rebelling and spending more time with friends, may instead cling to their families for support.

As a friend or family member helping to take care of the patient, you also have needs. Taking care of yourself will allow you to care for others. When your needs are met, the patient will also benefit. Overdoing is different from doing. Know your limits and rest when you need to. This rule applies to both caregivers and patients.

Peter, caregiver for his wife: *“As a caregiver, your life is not going to be the same. It's essential that you maintain a healthy, high-quality level of physical and mental fitness so that you can still carry on with your life, while also helping the one in treatment. Find compassionate and understanding friends who you can talk to relieve your stress. This way, you will be more available, physically and emotionally, to help your cancer partner and to have those candid discussions that are so important. In short, take care of yourself at the same time, paying attention to diet, exercise, and sleep, to better help others and yourself. While being realistic, try to remain optimistic.”*

You can learn more about being a caregiver for a person with cancer by reading *What It Takes to Be a Caregiver* and *What You Need to Know as a Cancer Caregiver*.

Often families find themselves treating the person with cancer like an invalid, even when the person is fully capable of doing for him- or herself. Sometimes the person with cancer won't want help with things like bathing and dressing. They may need to at least try to do as much as they can on their own. These wishes should be respected if at all possible.

Although the person with cancer may not want to get outside help, friends and family members should look at their own limits and get any help needed. Certified nursing assistants, home health aides, and other resources can help care for the patient. Talk to the health care team about what you need and what resources might be available.

Sexuality concerns if your partner has cancer

It's not unusual for people with cancer to withdraw from others, including their partners, when they have changes in their body and self-image. Partners can help their loved one work through their feelings and these changes by offering their love, support, and understanding. It takes time for people with cancer to adjust to the way they feel about themselves and how they look.

People with cancer who have changes that affect their sexuality want to know their partners still care for them and are still attracted to them. As a partner of someone with cancer, there are several ways you can convey these feelings. The first step is talking about your feelings and letting the person with cancer talk about changes in their sexuality, body image, and self-image.

Some people fear physical closeness because they think they can get cancer from their partner, or they're afraid they will hurt their partner. Cancer is not contagious – you cannot catch it from someone. A person cannot pass cancer to their partner through sex. But in some cases, you may be told to not have sex for a short period of time, for instance, when your partner is recovering from certain types of surgery or when they are more likely to get infections.

Ask the doctor if you need to take any precautions based on the treatment your partner will get. And talk with your partner about your concerns about causing pain or discomfort. While he or she may not feel like having sex for a time, cuddling, holding hands, and other gentle forms of touch are ways to show your love.

To learn more about sexuality and any concerns you may have, please see the sections for partners in *Sexuality for the Woman With Cancer* and *Sexuality for the Man With Cancer*.

Coping within the family

How a family handles cancer depends a lot on how the family has dealt with problems in the past. Those who are used to communicating openly and sharing feelings are usually able to talk about how cancer is affecting them. Families who solve their problems as individuals instead of a team might have more trouble coping with cancer.

Cancer treatment includes care for the patient and the family, not just the cancer. A mental health professional may already be a part of the cancer care team. If not, talk with the doctor or nurse to learn about other resources that can help you and your family cope with cancer.

People with cancer often say that lack of communication in their families is a problem. Changes in responsibilities can cause resentment and anxiety. Some family members may not feel comfortable openly discussing their feelings. Other family members may avoid the person with cancer because they feel as if they have nothing to offer, don't know how to act, or feel they can't do anything to help make the situation better. These factors can all make families more distant at a time when they need to pull together. Many families need help with this. Through family counseling, members can learn to deal with changes within the family and discuss their feelings more comfortably.

Family and friends can find ways to relieve their stress by taking part in activities outside the home. Resources outside the home, such as individual counseling or support groups, can serve as outlets for the frustrations you may be facing within your family. You may also want to look at "How can I relieve stress and relax?" in the section "For the person who has cancer" for more ideas on coping.

Finding support

Many resources are available for people with cancer and their families. Support can come from family and friends, as well as from health professionals, support groups, or your place of worship. Asking for support is one way you can feel in better control of what's going on in your life.

You may live alone or just feel alone. You may feel as if you have nothing to live for. If your friends and family are not supportive, find people who are. There are probably others in your community who need your companionship as much as you need theirs. The mutual support of others with cancer might also be a source of comfort. Check with your health care team, a member of the clergy, or call your local American Cancer Society office for resources in your community.

Types of support programs and groups

Support programs can be found in many formats and include individual or group counseling and support groups. Some groups are formal and focus on learning about cancer or dealing with feelings. Others are informal and social. Some groups are made up of only people with cancer or only caregivers, while others include spouses, family members, or friends. If family members are not in the group, patients may feel greater freedom in expressing exactly how they feel. But family members can also benefit from sharing their feelings, fears, and anxieties with other families affected by cancer.

Some groups focus on certain types of cancer or stages of disease. As mentioned earlier, cancer support groups for children are also available in some areas. Groups can meet for a certain number of weeks or the program can be ongoing. Some programs have closed membership and others are open to new, drop-in members.

Health professionals (a social worker, nurse, or other licensed professional), trained facilitators, or a group member may lead the group. The leader of a group should have some type of training before taking charge of a support group.

For those who cannot attend meetings or appointments, counseling over the telephone is offered by organizations such as CancerCare (see the "To learn more" section). Some people may find online support groups helpful because they like the privacy. It may be comforting to chat with other people facing situations much like yours. But keep in mind that chat rooms and message boards are not the best source of cancer information, especially if they are not monitored by trained professionals or experts.

No matter what kind of group it is, everyone taking part should feel comfortable in the group and with the facilitator. If you have any fears or uncertainties before entering a group, try to discuss them with the group's facilitator ahead of time.

Kay, cancer survivor: *"As soon as I was diagnosed, I told anyone who would listen, and everyone was great at just listening. I'm not very good in group situations. I enjoy one-on-one interaction. I think talking about my disease to different family members and friends was MY support group and a good way for me to get some positive feedback. I never found it difficult to talk about cancer. Maybe that was because my mother had also been a breast cancer survivor. After the diagnosis of my recurrence, I did attend several support groups.*

Although I could see that this truly helped other members of the group, I just felt like it wasn't for me."

Support in any form allows you to talk about your feelings and develop skills to cope with the changes taking place in your life. Some studies have found that people who go to support groups have an improved quality of life, including better sleep and appetite.

Self-help groups

Self-help groups are most often run by non-professionals who have been through the same kinds of problems or crises. The people in these groups can relate to your experience firsthand and often share treatment-related tips and advice that may help you. For example, they may offer a home remedy that helped with their nausea, or know where to get the best prices on wigs and turbans.

Self-help groups also give people a chance to help others with cancer. With some training, many people with cancer have found that helping others makes them feel better about themselves. They may go on to become group counselors or facilitators.

Delores, cancer survivor: *"I'm a Reach To Recovery volunteer. When you talk to someone who has been through what you are going through and they are healthy and happy, it can be very comforting. Sharing my experience helps calm the fears of newly diagnosed patients. It's a joy to hear the fear leave their voices."*

Choosing when to take part in a support group is important. Some find it difficult to join a support group when they are first diagnosed. The stories that other patients may share, after months or even years of treatment, can be overwhelming and upsetting. If you try a group and it doesn't feel right, you may want to try again later or try another group.

Marisol, cancer survivor: *"After treatment I found a support group to be an excellent way to keep up-to-date on the latest treatments. We recently celebrated our 10th anniversary and invited our spouses to attend. There are 7 of us that are breast cancer survivors of 10 or more years."*

Religion and spirituality

Religion can be a source of strength for some people. Some find new faith when diagnosed with cancer. Others find their cancer experience strengthens their existing faith or their faith gives them newfound strength and hope. A minister, rabbi, other leader of your faith, or a trained pastoral counselor can help you find spiritual support. Some members of the clergy are specially trained to minister to people with cancer and their families. Some hospitals also have chaplains available.

Others who have never had strong religious beliefs may not feel an urge to turn to religion at this time. They may benefit from other types of spiritual work, such as meditation or daily practices

such as silent observation, listening, or gratitude. Some people express their spirituality by spending time with nature, doing creative work, or serving others. These can become part of an open-ended spirituality that can infuse everyday life.

Other kinds of help you may need during treatment

Along with emotional support programs, other means of support may be available in your community such as:

- Home health nursing services
- Social services, such as counseling and financial aid
- Nutrition services that provide meals or allow you to talk with a registered dietitian
- Rehabilitation services offered by physical and occupational therapists

Life after cancer treatment

Delores, cancer survivor: *“Your last day of treatment is a day to celebrate! When treatment is over it can be difficult sometimes to get back to your normal pre-cancer life. The diagnosis of cancer dominates your life for so long, when treatment is over it takes a while to get back into your regular routine. I think I find my anniversary of being diagnosed a time of mixed emotions. You are thrilled to have made it another year of being cancer-free, yet you are also reminded of the anguish you went through.”*

When treatment ends, people begin a new chapter in their lives, one that can bring hope, happiness, and maybe fear. The fear of cancer coming back is common among cancer survivors and can sometimes be quite intense.

Delores, cancer survivor: *“The most difficult thing for me as a survivor is having a ‘history.’ Any aches or pains I have result in numerous tests. I am a runner and I was having pain in my hip. I went to the doctor and after a couple of appointments I had a bone scan followed by an MRI. I was very fortunate that it was not cancer and I just needed a new pair of shoes!”*

Follow-up appointments with your doctor and anniversaries of your cancer diagnosis can bring mixed emotions.

Kay, cancer survivor: *“I have regular follow-up tests to be sure that I’m cancer-free, which gives me peace of mind. Even though my dermatologist tells me that she would be*

comfortable checking me out every 6 months or even annually, she was also very agreeable to seeing me every 3 months at my request – for my own comfort level.

I admit that for the first few years, every time my anniversary came around my anxiety level increased, mostly because I went through a battery of tests. To help me through this, I always had someone go with me to the tests. However, the anniversary of my diagnosis is not a special date to be recognized or feared any more. I feel fortunate to be a survivor of many years and I'm grateful for each morning I awake and am able to get out of bed."

Returning to everyday life

Each person with cancer looks forward to getting back to a more normal life, but the process can be challenging. Everyone deals with these challenges in their own way.

Kay, cancer survivor: *"Getting back to the normal activities of life, especially playing sports, was the greatest therapy for me. When I was diagnosed, I just wanted to get the operation and treatment behind me so that I could get on with my life. Although I never dwell on my situation or the possible outcomes, the reality that this disease could come and take me at any time is always present. I can't keep myself from thinking these thoughts. Still, I do make a conscious effort to think positive, make plans for the future, make sure to have regular follow-up testing for early detection, eat a healthy diet, and get regular exercise."*

Relationships outside the family

Cancer can change the pattern of relationships outside the family as well as those within. Friends may not have kept in touch for a variety of reasons. Now, people might not know how to respond to a change in how you look or may avoid you so they don't have to think about the possibility of your death or be reminded that we all must die someday. Some people may shy away from you and not know how to talk to you. Know that if you're open to talking about your experience with cancer, they may feel more comfortable, too.

Going back to work

If your career is an important part of your life, going back to work as soon as you are physically able is one way to return stability to your life. If treatment has made you unable to go back to your previous job, look into rehabilitation and retraining programs in your community.

When you do go back to work you may find that relationships with co-workers have changed. You may feel "back to your old self," but they may not be as comfortable around you as they were before. Some may act like you didn't have cancer, and not talk about that part of your life. Or, they may see that you look well and are able to function and underestimate the seriousness of what you've been through. Co-workers may be unsure of what to do or say or may try to protect your feelings. For more information on this topic, please see our document called *When Someone You Work With Has Cancer*.

Questions about future employment and health insurance may also come up. There are resources available to help answer these questions. Organizations like the Job Accommodation Network, the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, and the Patient Advocate Foundation provide much-needed resources for cancer survivors.

If you feel you have been discriminated against, either on the job or in dealing with insurance, find out about state laws where you live and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Many people are able to keep their jobs during cancer treatment through the provisions of this law. Others may need help with time off from work, which the *Family and Medical Leave Act* can make easier for some people.

See the “To learn more” section to get more information on workplace issues, as well as phone numbers and web addresses for these organizations and others that offer valuable services to people affected by cancer.

Finding hope

Cancer is not a death sentence. Cure rates continue to improve as new medicines and treatments are discovered. Some types of cancer have better prognoses (outlooks) than others, but overall, people with cancer are living longer than ever before.

Doctors cannot predict how long a person will live. They can only make an educated guess based on what they’ve seen in other patients in similar situations. Even when a person’s outlook is poor, encouraging test results, new research discoveries, and treatments that can help control the disease can give hope. Love and support can also provide hope.

Regardless of the prognosis, this time is a chance to do things you’ve always wanted to do and spend quality time with family and friends.

Kay, cancer survivor: *“My children have been my greatest motivation for staying healthy. I think they are more compassionate and sensitive individuals from having to deal with my cancer. I pray that they have learned to take care of their own health and take preventive actions to ensure their own survival. I am a 13-year survivor of breast cancer I’ve had doctors tell me how lucky I am to be alive, considering how extensive my cancer was. I have to admit that my immediate thought was that I was going to die – and soon. I would like every person who hears this dreaded information to know that they don’t have to be a statistic. Just because the statistics say something, well, there are always exceptions. I’ve also had basal, squamous, and melanoma skin cancers and cervical cancer. I’m still here to watch my children grow, and I plan on seeing my 6 year-old have children of his own.”*

Keep the focus on what you can do rather than what you can’t. Lead an active life and have a sense of purpose. These things help most people cope with cancer. It’s not always possible to do things you did in the past, but there are ways to make each day count.

Cheng, cancer survivor: *“Always carry a good laugh inside, as humor is the foundation for successfully facing life’s challenges. Funny things do happen in the most desperate*

circumstances. We just have to take the blinders off. Of course this doesn't mean that cancer is a laugh-a-minute experience because it certainly is not. We just need to be receptive to all parts of our life and not only the bad."

To learn more

American Cancer Society resources

The American Cancer Society is here for you – before, during, and after a diagnosis of cancer. We help people by giving them up-to-date cancer information, programs, and referrals. Check your local phone book or our website for an American Cancer Society office near you or call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 to learn more about our programs and what we can do to help you get well and stay well.

Cancer Survivors NetworkSM

The Cancer Survivors Network is a free online community created by and for people with cancer and their families. This online community is a welcoming, safe place for people to find hope and inspiration from others who have “been there.” Services include discussion boards, chat rooms, and personal web space to tell your story, blog, post images, exchange private messages with members, and much more. Check it out at <http://csn.cancer.org>

Hope Lodge

The American Cancer Society Hope Lodge Network offers people with cancer and their families a free, temporary place to stay when their best hope for quality care is far from home. By not having to worry about where to stay or how to pay for lodging, Hope Lodge guests can focus on getting well. And Hope Lodge offers much more than just free lodging. It provides a nurturing, home-like environment where patients and caregivers can retreat to private rooms or connect with others who are going through similar experiences. The Society can tell you if there are other resources offering free or low-cost lodging in cities where a Hope Lodge is not available.

I Can Cope[®]

I Can Cope[®] is a free online educational program for people facing cancer and their families and friends. The program is comprised of self-paced classes that can be taken any time, day or night. Take as few or as many classes as you like. Many topics are offered, such as information about cancer, managing treatments and side effects, healthy eating during and after treatment, communicating with family and friends, finding resources, and more. These free classes are available any time at cancer.org/onlineclasses.

Look Good Feel Better[®]

Some cancer treatments can change the way you look. At a Look Good Feel Better session, you can learn ways to help with side effects like hair loss and skin changes. There are also programs for men and teens. This free program is offered jointly by the American Cancer Society, the

Personal Care Products Council Foundation, and the Professional Beauty Association | National Cosmetology Association. For more information, call 1-800-395-LOOK (1-800-395-5665) or your local American Cancer Society office.

Reach To Recovery®

If you have breast cancer, you may want to talk to someone who knows what you're feeling – someone who has “been there.” We can help through our free Reach To Recovery program. You will be matched with a trained breast cancer survivor who will provide you information, resource referrals, and support. Efforts are made to match you with a volunteer with a diagnosis, treatment type, and age similar to yours. They know what it's like to hear the words “You have breast cancer” and can talk with you about coping with your breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Road To Recovery

Every day, thousands of cancer patients need a ride to treatment, but some may not have a way to get there. If finding a ride is a problem for you, we may be able to help. Our Road To Recovery program provides free rides to and from treatment and medical appointments for people with cancer who do not have a ride or are unable to drive themselves. Volunteer drivers donate their time and the use of their cars so that patients can get the lifesaving treatments they need.

“tlc” magalog

Tender Loving Care, or “tlc,” is the American Cancer Society's direct mail/online catalog and magazine for women. It offers helpful articles and a line of products made for women fighting cancer. Products include wigs, hairpieces, breast forms, bras, hats, turbans, swimwear, and accessories. You can order by phone at 1-800-850-9445 or online at www.tlcdirect.org. All proceeds from product sales go back into the American Cancer Society's programs and services for patients and survivors.

More information from your American Cancer Society

We have selected some related information that may also be helpful to you. These materials may be read on our website, www.cancer.org, or ordered from our toll-free number 1-800-227-2345.

To learn more about dealing with a cancer diagnosis

After Diagnosis: A Guide for Patients and Families (also in Spanish)

Talking With Friends and Relatives About Your Cancer (also in Spanish)

Helping Children When a Family Member Has Cancer: Dealing With Diagnosis (also in Spanish)

Children Diagnosed With Cancer: Dealing With Diagnosis (also in Spanish)

More on cancer treatments and side effects

A Guide to Cancer Surgery (also in Spanish)

A Guide to Chemotherapy (also in Spanish)

Understanding Radiation Therapy: A Guide for Patients and Families (also in Spanish)

Anxiety, Fear, and Depression (also in Spanish)

Sexuality for the Man With Cancer (also in Spanish)

Sexuality for the Woman With Cancer (also in Spanish)

Many more topics are available, as well as information on specific types of cancer and how they are commonly treated.

Finances, work, and legal issues

Americans With Disabilities Act – Information for People Facing Cancer (also in Spanish)

Family and Medical Leave Act (also in Spanish)

Health Insurance and Financial Assistance for the Cancer Patient (also in Spanish)

Supporting a person with cancer

Caring For the Patient With Cancer At Home: A Guide for Patients and Families (also in Spanish)

What it Takes to Be a Caregiver

What You Need to Know as a Cancer Caregiver

Listen With Your Heart (also in Spanish)

When Someone You Know Has Cancer (also in Spanish)

When Someone You Work With Has Cancer (also in Spanish)

Books

Your American Cancer Society also has books that you might find helpful. Call us at 1-800-227-2345 or visit our bookstore online at www.cancer.org/bookstore to find out about costs or to place an order.

National organizations and websites*

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information and support include:

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Toll-free number: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Website: www.cancer.gov

Offers current information about cancer and cancer treatment, living with cancer, children with cancer in the family, cancer research; help with quitting smoking, and much more

CancerCare

Toll-free number: 1-800-813-4673

Website: www.cancercare.org

Has phone counseling which can be one-on-one or professionally-led support groups; also offers online support groups led by oncology social workers for people with cancer and for others, including young adults, caregivers, and the bereaved; also offers many other resources

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)

Toll-free number: 1-877-NCCS-YES (1-877-622-7937)

Website: www.canceradvocacy.org

Offers information on work, health insurance, and more for people with cancer. The Cancer Survival Toolbox is a free, self-learning audio program developed to help cancer survivors and caregivers develop the practical tools needed to deal with the diagnosis, treatment, and challenges of cancer. Listen online or order CDs. Also available in Spanish and Chinese.

Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)

Toll-free number: 1-888-879-4210

Website: www.patientadvocate.org

Helps mediate between the patient and insurer, employer, or creditors to resolve insurance, job, or debt problems related to cancer. Helps people get the health care they need and keep their job and financial stability.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Toll-free number: 1-800-526-7234

TTY: 1-877-781-9403

Website: www.askjan.org

Offers information about asking for help (accommodations) to keep working when people have cancer-related disabilities and limitations, and ideas on how to approach employers for accommodations

** Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement by the American Cancer Society*

No matter who you are, we can help. Contact us anytime, day or night, for information and support. Call us at **1-800-227-2345** or visit www.cancer.org.

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For additional assistance please contact your American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345 or www.cancer.org