

# Caregiving is Love

## Ways that you can help someone in need

It is often difficult to know just what to say or do when someone you know has just been diagnosed with a serious illness like cancer. Some of the suggestions below might be helpful to you if this should happen to someone in your life. One thing to keep in mind is the patient's situation in life: are they single or married, do they have young children or grown children who live far away? Do they have a large support network of friends, a church community or caring coworkers? The help you offer might depend on how much support they already have and what support they might need.

1. **Say you are sorry for their diagnosis.** Offer a nice warm hug and/or a hot meal. Sending cards and flowers is definitely okay and very welcome. This is not the time to tell the patient about all of the other people you have known who had the same diagnosis.
2. **Gather more information.** Schedule a good time to ask more questions about possible surgery and treatment. You can also find out more details from mutual friends, family or coworkers.
3. **Respect privacy.** Not everyone likes to have medical details blasted across all social media and from every rooftop. Best to ask if you can share the news. Many people choose to keep cancer news quiet until they have a firm treatment plan in place. Still others do not want to be the center of attention and might not want information shared. But it is also true that no one can pray for you if they don't know you need some extra prayers.
4. **Be yourself.** Patients still like to laugh and giggle and hear about your life, too. Don't let cancer take over all your conversations. Hugs and laughter are often the best medicine in times of stress.
5. **Be flexible.** Surgery and treatment can leave patients with mood swings, loss of movement, appetite changes, poor concentration and intense fatigue. Each day may bring different needs and issues. Don't be offended if calls, texts or emails go unanswered. Keep sending your prayers and best wishes!
6. **Be specific with your help.** Please do not say, "Let me know what I can do to help." That may seem like the best thing to say but most patients don't know what they really need and your offer may seem less genuine than you intended. Be specific:

- If you are headed to the grocery or pharmacy, offer to pick up something.
  - Arrange to pick up kids from school or daycare or take kids to and from activities.
  - Offer to run errands.
  - Cook a meal or send small containers of soup for the freezer.
7. **Set up a Caring Bridge or online information site.** It can be difficult to keep up with correspondence but an online information site like Caring Bridge can help communicate to a large group with one click.
  8. **Set up a meal delivery schedule.** Cooking is often the last thing on a patient's mind but healthy eating is vital to recovery. Nothing means quite as much as a meal delivered with love.
  9. **Set up social time in between treatments.** Cancer patients often have chemotherapy treatments every three weeks and feel pretty lousy at least 1.5 weeks after the treatment. Schedule lunch or something fun like a movie in between treatments.
  10. **Text, call and email often.** Treatment is not short-term. Make sure to keep communicating just to say hi or to offer your prayers. Your connection means the world!

Know that your friend needs you the entire time of treatment but that your help can come in so many different ways. Find out what works best for you and your friend and keep it up.

Cancer often changes people, those who have the disease and those who care for them. Outlooks on life may change and your friend will, no doubt, be a stronger soul at the end of treatment. Remember what a gift it is to be part of their journey of faith and self-discovery.