

# How to support someone with cancer

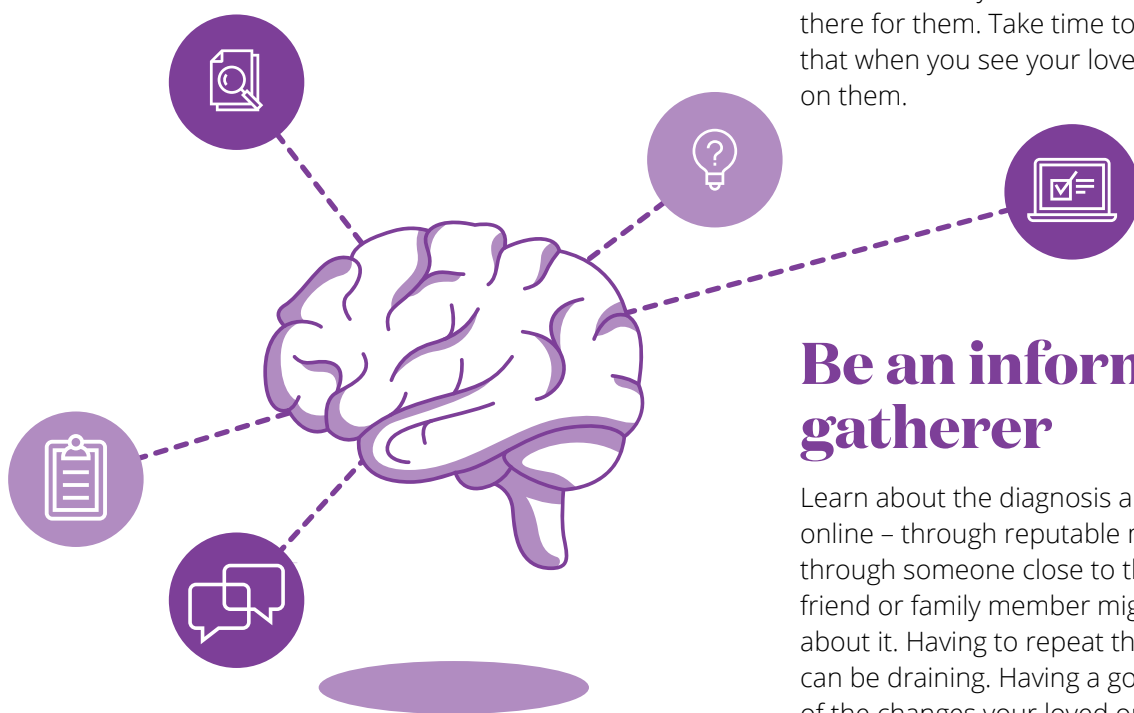


If you have recently found out that a loved one, friend or colleague has cancer, this article could help you support them as best you can.

**I**t's not easy to support someone when they are going through a difficult time, so when a loved one has cancer it's not always obvious what we should do. This article offers advice on how to help someone with cancer – be it a family member, friend or colleague.

## Take time to prepare for yourself

In order to make sure that you can offer as much support as your loved one requires, you need to ensure that you are emotionally ready to be there for them. Take time to process the news so that when you see your loved one you can focus on them.



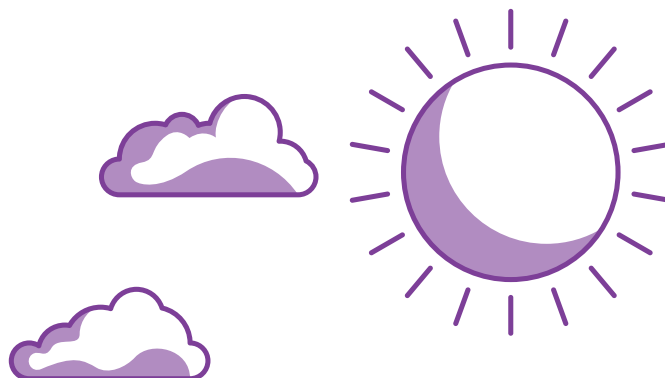
## Be an information gatherer

Learn about the diagnosis and treatment, either online – through reputable medical sources – or through someone close to the person, as your friend or family member might not want to talk about it. Having to repeat the same information can be draining. Having a good understanding of the changes your loved one will go through can also help you in supporting them, as well as preparing you for any physical changes you notice when you see them.

You may also want to find some information that could be useful for your loved one, such as good ways to manage side effects or any local support services.

# Their emotions

Your loved one will probably feel a lot of different emotions following their diagnosis. These could include anger, sadness, loneliness, fear, frustration, resentment, grief and guilt. It is very normal for someone to experience mood swings after a diagnosis, with emotions likely to change quite suddenly. Be aware and be patient.



## Allow your loved one to be upset

If you are more aware of the emotions your loved one may go through, you won't be as surprised when they happen. This will allow the person to feel their emotions and explore them. It is important that this happens – don't try and stop them from being upset or sad.

## Respect their need to be alone

As well as being there to support them at times when they may feel emotions such as loneliness, it is important to understand that they may need some space. Knowing when they need time to themselves and respecting that is an important part of the process.



# Keep in touch

Ensuring that you maintain the relationship you have with your loved one is crucial. Try your best to see them as often as possible – and as often as they permit – to help them feel less isolated. Friendship makes a real difference as people often feel more vulnerable.

## Be a good listener

When seeing your friend or family member, spend time listening to them. They may be experiencing a lot of changes and may want to share their worries with you. You may not always have the answers, but allowing them to share their stories may provide them with all the support they need.



## What to say

Finding the right things to say can be difficult when supporting a family member with cancer. The important thing is to make sure you keep in contact with them rather than stop talking to them due to your own anxieties about what to say.

- "I'm sorry this has happened"
- "I'm here to listen whenever you want to talk"
- "I'm thinking of you"
- "How can I help?"

Using a touch of sensitive, appropriate humour is believed to help people [improve their outlook, mood and well-being and reduce stress](#) and promote bonding, which might make treatment more tolerable.

## Use silence and touch

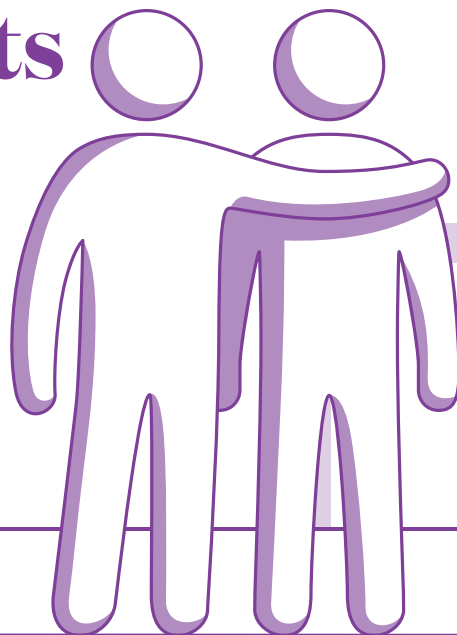
When listening to your loved one, you don't always have to say something in response. Sometimes silence can help you both have a moment to connect and collect your thoughts. Make sure you physically engage with your friend or family member – hold their hand or put your arm around them. If they pull away, understand that they may prefer more space.

# Privacy and confidentiality

Whether the person you know is a family member, friend or colleague, it is important to respect their privacy. You should not share any of their personal information with other friends or people at work – whether the information is that they have been diagnosed or a story from their treatment.

## Go with them to appointments

As we have discussed, when a loved one has cancer, it is important to spend time with them. A great way to support them can be attending potentially daunting appointments and chemotherapy or radiotherapy sessions with them. Cancer treatment can be both physically and mentally draining, so having someone there can make the process easier for cancer patients – as well as being able to provide transport.



## Offer practical help

The side effects of cancer treatment can include fatigue and nausea, making everyday tasks more challenging. Offering to transport your loved one to and from their treatment sessions is one example of how you can provide practical help. Doing a food shop, looking after children or pets, or helping with household chores can really make a difference.

# Finding support groups

Support groups can help provide the valuable help for your loved one that you might not be able to give. By being able to meet with other people who have been diagnosed with cancer and are also undergoing treatment, your friend or family member can share experiences and find people they can relate to.

Many support groups can now be found online, making them accessible no matter where you live. This is also helpful if your loved one struggles to make it to support groups due to the side effects of their treatment.



“You may not always have the answers, but allowing them to share their stories may provide them with all the support they need”

## Gifts

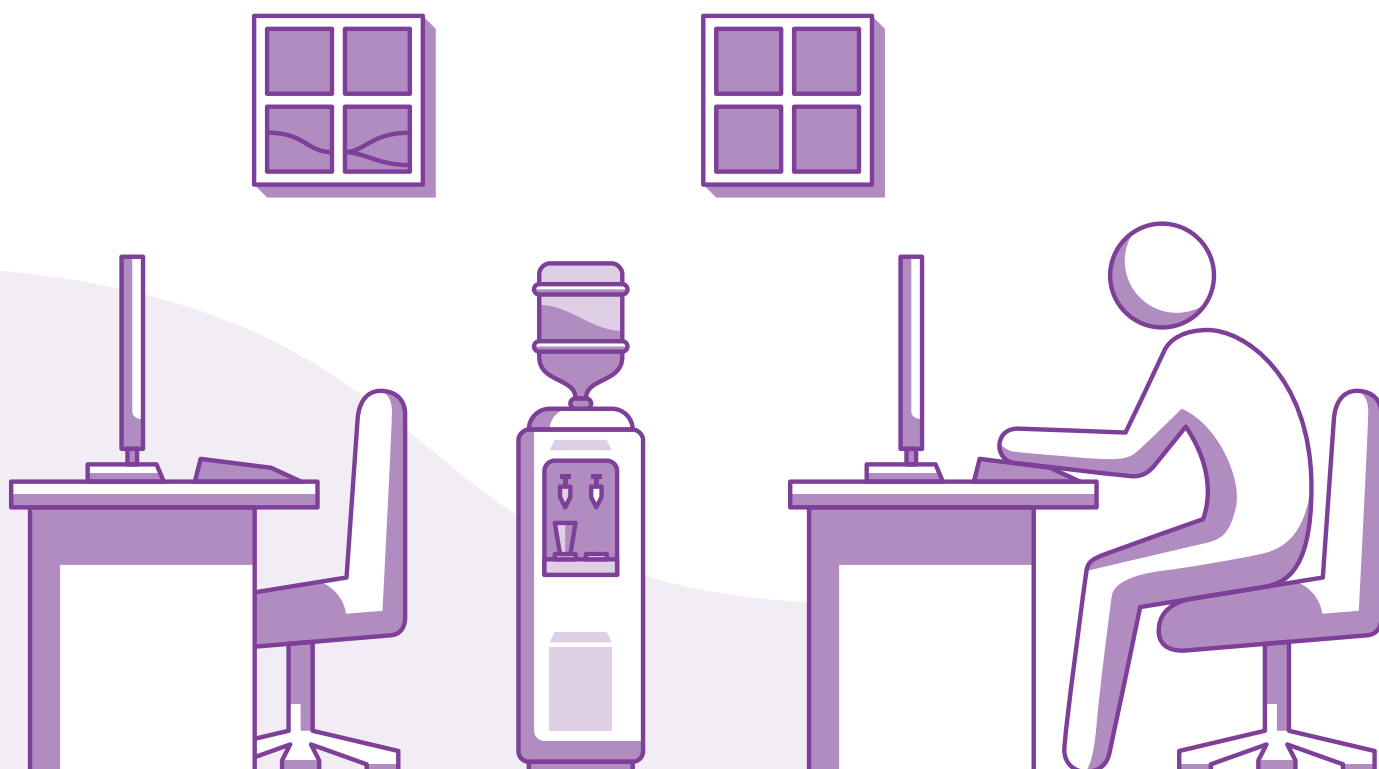
Gift-giving is a good method of how to support someone with cancer in the family or your friendship group. By giving someone a present, no matter how small, it shows how much they mean to you and that you are thinking of them. Whether the presents are to keep them entertained during treatment or for the days they can't get out of bed, or products to help build up their confidence, there are many gift ideas that can help keep spirits up.



# The importance of work

Maybe the person you know who has recently been diagnosed is a colleague. For some people, getting back into a routine whilst undergoing treatment is important. It can be powerful to feel needed and productive. Going back to work can serve as a distraction, an opportunity to socialise and a boost in feelings of self-worth.

“For some people, getting back into a routine whilst undergoing treatment is important”



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## Further reading:

For more information please read our helpful resources.

[Male breast cancer](#)

[Eat away at your cancer risk](#)

[A doctor talks about the damaging effects of smoking tobacco](#)

[Expat health: What to do if you or a loved one gets a cancer diagnosis abroad](#)

[A tale of two worlds: Cancer in the developed and developing world](#)

[Breast cancer prevention: How you can reduce your risk of breast cancer](#)

[A factual list of cancer-causing foods and cancer-fighting foods](#)

[Practical and emotional tips for supporting a loved one with cancer](#)

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