



Getting the Support You Need

Types of support

There are three main types of support: informational, emotional and practical. You may need different kinds of support at different times. This support may also come from different people during your treatment and recovery. The people in your life who are there to lend support from diagnosis through treatment and beyond are called co-survivors. They can be family members, spouses or partners, friends, health care providers or colleagues. It is normal for co-survivors to come and go during your breast cancer journey.

Co-survivors can provide:

- Informational support — This might include finding facts about your type of breast cancer or treatment options. They might also talk to others on your behalf that have gone through breast cancer.
- Emotional support — They may listen to you, give you the chance to express your feelings, give you a hug or just be there when you need a friend.
- Practical support — This might include rides to appointments, help with cooking or cleaning or going to the doctor with you to take notes and provide a second set of ears.

Benefits of social support

- Reduced anxiety and psychological distress
- Reduced depression and feelings of pain
- Improved mood and/or self-image
- Improved ability to cope
- Improved feelings of control

Why you need support

We are each of us angels with only one wing. And we can only fly embracing each other.

~ Luciano de Crescenzo

No one should face breast cancer alone. Getting the support you need is important to your well-being. It can help you cope with breast cancer. Try to surround yourself with people who care about you and give you the strength you need to go through this journey. It can be hard to ask for help when you really need it.

Many women are used to being caregivers, but not receivers. They may not ask for support. It may help to remember that people need you as much as you need them. Your friends and family will feel good, maybe even honored, that you need them to help you get through this difficult time in your life.



Should you join a support group?

A support group can be a key part of your recovery. Support groups are often led by a professional who guides discussions and helps the group to focus. Most groups require that everything discussed in the group remains within the group. Members are not usually pressured to talk. However, the group benefits most when everyone shares his or her feelings.

If you choose to join a support group, find one that is right for you. There are support groups for people in different stages of illness or recovery. Some groups are run by breast cancer survivors. Support groups are a commitment of time and energy. Most who join them usually agree that it is worth it.

If you don't like sharing your thoughts or feelings in front of a group, you may get more comfort by talking to a partner or close friend. There are many online support resources as well.

Getting support

1. The first step is to write down the names of people (co-survivors) who might support you in different ways. Your list might include: your spouse or partner, children, other family members, friends, support group members, co-workers, clergy, neighbors or even health care providers. Look outside your existing network of support people, too. Have you met any other people with breast cancer? Can you think of anyone else who may be able to help you in some way?
2. Write down what kind of support you would like most from each of the people on your list. For instance, maybe you would like a doctor to give you informational support, your best friend to give you practical support and your spouse to give you all three kinds of support.
3. Tell each person exactly what he or she can do to help you. Be specific. They can help with the laundry, the bills, cleaning and running errands. Sometimes all it takes is asking.
4. Have a "backup" support person. Although it is true that you are the one who has breast cancer, the special people in your life have also been affected by your illness. Sometimes co-survivors will need to deal with their own feelings before they can support you.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
www.komentoolkits.org

Pink Alliance
www.pinkalliance.net