CIBC

Supporting a loved one through cancer

A guide for family members, friends, and caregivers



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Introduction

When someone you care about is diagnosed with cancer, it can be difficult to know what to say, what to do, or how best to help. You may feel worried, overwhelmed, or unsure of how to support them through their journey.

The good news is that you do not need to have all the answers. Your presence, compassion, and willingness to help can make a tremendous difference.

This booklet provides practical tips, emotional support strategies, and self-care advice to help you support a friend or family member living with cancer as well as helpful tips and information for caregivers.



Understanding the impact of cancer

Cancer affects more than the person receiving treatment. It can impact:

- Family relationships
- Friendships
- Work and finances
- Mental and emotional health
- Daily routines and activities

Everyone experiences cancer differently. A person's feelings may change from day to day and include:

- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Hope
- Frustration
- Gratitude

Remember: There is no "right way" to feel.



How to be there for someone with cancer

1. Simply show up

One of the most valuable gifts you can offer is your presence. You do not need to find the perfect words. Sometimes just sitting quietly together is enough.

Try saying:

- "I'm here for you."
- "You don't have to go through this alone."
- "How are you feeling today?"

Avoid:

- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "Stay positive."
- Comparing their experience to someone else's.



How to be there for someone with cancer (cont'd)

2. Listen more than you speak

Many people with cancer need a safe space to express their fears, frustrations, and emotions.

When listening:

- Give your full attention
- Let them speak without interruption
- Accept their feelings without trying to fix everything
- Acknowledge their emotions

Examples:

- "That sounds really difficult."
- "I can understand why you feel that way."
- "Thank you for sharing that with me."

3. Respect their choices

Cancer treatment decisions can be complex and deeply personal.

Support your loved one by:

- Respecting their decisions
- Avoiding judgment
- Offering information only when requested
- Understanding that their priorities may change

Remember: They are the expert on their own experience.

Practical ways to help

Many people are eager to help but don't know how. Specific offers of assistance are often more useful than saying, "Let me know if you need anything."



Helpful ideas

At home

- Prepare meals
- Grocery shop
- Clean the house
- Do laundry
- Take care of pets
- Help with childcare

During treatment

- Provide transportation
- Accompany them to appointments
- Help take notes during medical visits
- Pick up prescriptions

Daily support

- Run errands
- Assist with paperwork
- Help organise schedules
- Check in regularly

Instead of asking: "What do you need?"
Try: "I'm going grocery shopping tomorrow. What can I pick up for you?"

Supporting emotional well-being

Cancer can bring emotional challenges that are just as significant as physical ones.

Encourage connection

Help your loved one stay connected with:

- Family
- Friends
- Faith communities
- Support groups
- Social activities when possible

Celebrate small victories

Recognise milestones such as:

- Completing a treatment session
- Receiving good test results
- Feeling strong enough to enjoy a favourite activity

Celebrating progress can provide encouragement and hope.



Supporting children and teenagers

When cancer affects a parent, grandparent, sibling, or close family member, children may experience confusion and anxiety.

Helpful tips:

- Be honest using age-appropriate language
- Encourage questions
- Maintain routines when possible
- Reassure them that they are loved and supported
- Watch for changes in behaviour that may signal stress

Children often cope better when they receive clear, truthful information.



What to do when treatment is difficult

There may be days when treatments cause fatigue, pain, nausea, or emotional exhaustion.

During these periods:

Be flexible

Plans may need to change unexpectedly.

Offer patience

Recovery and healing often take time.

Focus on comfort

Small gestures can have a big impact:

- A favourite meal
- A comforting blanket
- A thoughtful text message
- A quiet visit



Caring for the caregiver

Supporting someone with cancer can be rewarding, but it can also be emotionally and physically demanding.

Remember: You cannot pour from an empty cup.

Make time for yourself

- Get adequate rest
- Eat nutritious meals
- Exercise regularly
- Stay connected with friends
- Continue activities you enjoy

Seek support

Talk to:

- Family members
- Trusted friends
- Counselors
- Faith leaders
- Caregiver support groups

Asking for help is a sign of strength - not weakness.



Self-care activities for caregivers

Caring for someone with cancer is an act of love, but it is important to remember that your well-being matters too. Taking care of yourself is not selfish - it helps you maintain the physical, emotional, and mental strength needed to support your loved one.

Physical self-care

Stay active

Even short periods of physical activity can boost energy and reduce stress. Ideas include:

- Daily walks
- Yoga or stretching
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Cycling
- Light home workouts

Prioritise sleep

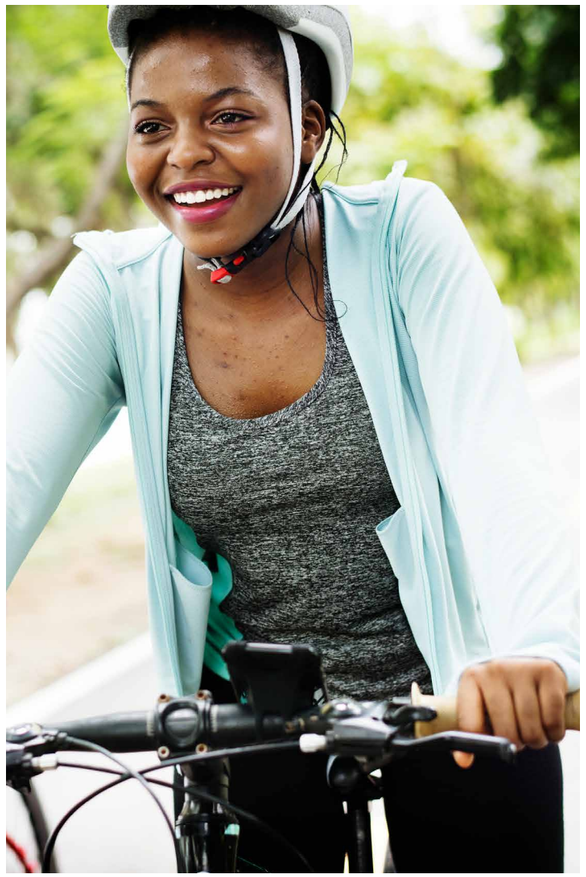
Aim for 7–9 hours of quality sleep each night. Helpful habits:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule
- Limit screen time before bed
- Create a calm bedtime routine

Nourish your body

Healthy eating helps support your immune system and energy levels. Focus on:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Lean proteins
- Plenty of water



Caring for the caregiver (cont'd)



Emotional self-care

Keep a journal

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help process difficult emotions and reduce stress.

Try:

- Gratitude journaling
- Daily reflections
- Recording positive moment

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness techniques can help you stay present and calm.

Activities include:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Guided relaxation
- Prayer or spiritual reflection

Allow yourself to feel

It's normal to experience a range of emotions, including fear, sadness, frustration, and guilt.

Give yourself permission to:

- Cry when needed
- Express concerns
- Seek comfort from others

Caring for the caregiver (cont'd)

Social self-care

Stay connected

Maintain relationships outside of your caregiving role.

Make time for:

- Coffee with a friend
- Family gatherings
- Phone calls
- Community activities

Join a support group

Connecting with other caregivers can provide:

- Encouragement
- Practical advice
- Emotional understanding
- A sense of community



Caring for the caregiver (cont'd)

Mental self-care

Take regular breaks

Schedule time away from caregiving responsibilities whenever possible.

Use that time to:

- Rest
- Read a book
- Watch a movie
- Enjoy a hobby

Learn something new

Engaging your mind can provide a healthy distraction.

Consider:

- Taking an online course
- Learning a language
- Cooking a new recipe
- Exploring a creative skill



Caring for the caregiver (cont'd)

Creative self-care

Creative activities can help reduce stress and improve mood.

Ideas include:

- Painting
- Drawing
- Photography
- Gardening
- Knitting or crocheting
- Playing a musical instrument
- Crafting



Spiritual self-care

For many people, faith and spirituality provide comfort and resilience.

You may find strength through:

- Prayer
- Attending religious services
- Reading inspirational material
- Spending time in nature
- Practicing gratitude



Caring for the caregiver (cont'd)

Quick self-care activities (5–15 minutes)

When time is limited, try:

- Taking a short walk outdoors
- Listening to your favorite song
- Enjoying a cup of tea, coffee or a glass of wine (we don't judge) in silence
- Stretching
- Practicing deep breathing
- Reading a few pages of a book
- Calling a friend
- Watching a funny video

Remember

You cannot care effectively for someone else if you neglect your own health and well-being. Taking breaks, seeking support, and engaging in activities that bring you joy are essential parts of being a healthy caregiver.

Caregiver affirmation

"I am doing the best I can. My well-being matters. Taking care of myself allows me to better care for those I love."



Recognising caregiver burnout

You may be experiencing burnout if you notice:

- Constant fatigue
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Withdrawal from others

If these feelings persist, seek support from a healthcare professional or counselor.



Helpful reminders

Do:

- Listen with empathy
- Offer practical help
- Respect boundaries
- Stay connected
- Be patient
- Take care of yourself

Don't:

- Minimise their feelings
- Offer unwanted advice
- Make assumptions
- Pressure them to be positive
- Forget your own well-being



A message of hope

Cancer is a journey that no one should face alone. Whether you are a spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, colleague, or neighbour, your support can provide comfort, strength, and hope during some of life's most challenging moments.

Every phone call, visit, meal, ride, hug, and kind word matters.

Your presence can make a profound difference.

Resources

For additional support, consider reaching out to:

- Local cancer support organisations
- National cancer societies
- Oncology social workers
- Mental health professionals
- Faith-based support groups
- Caregiver support networks

Together, we can make every step of the journey easier

Supporting a loved one with cancer is not about having all the answers, it's about showing up, staying connected, and reminding them they are never alone.