



how to be a friend to someone with cancer

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When your friend has cancer it can be hard to know what to do. Many studies have found that cancer survivors with strong emotional support tend to better adjust to the changes cancer brings to their lives, have a more positive outlook, and often report a better quality of life. Having cancer can be very isolating, so here are some ideas for friends ...

Stay in touch

Having cancer can be very isolating, so it is important just to stay in touch.

If you visit, keep it short, don't come unannounced, check what time of day is best for a visit.

Don't be afraid to give a hug or a hand shake – sometimes friends are afraid of coming close.

Don't visit if you have a cold – cancer patients often have low immunity to infection and a raised temperature can be dangerous to their health.

Send a text or email in-between visits; think about adding a cartoon, photo, a child's drawing – anything you think they'll enjoy.

Be understanding if you turn up and your friend doesn't feel like seeing you today.

What can you talk about?

Ask them about their treatment – you don't have to avoid the subject or the word 'cancer'.

Don't give your advice about "cures" or "wonder treatments" that you've heard about.

Ask if they'd like to listen to music, have you read the newspaper to them or do a crossword or a jigsaw puzzle together during your visit.

Support your friend's feelings – allow them to be tired, grumpy, scared, worried – let them know they can talk about these feelings with you.

Don't talk about your friend to family or medical staff while they are asleep – they may be just dozing and be able to hear you.

Don't be afraid to talk about the usual topics you shared – family, work, sport, holidays – they may find these "normal" conversations a welcome distraction.

Don't tell them how proud you are because they are so strong – they may feel pressured to behave like this in front of others when in fact they might be feeling quite different.

What practical things can you do?

Take them to appointments, sit in the waiting room or do some errands while you wait.

Pick up prescriptions, walk their dog, pick up their mail, go to the supermarket, collect children from school, water the garden – its everyday chores that can seem impossible.

If your friend is having chemo, ask if there are any foods they would like you to buy or prepare.

It can be hard to ask for your help – Call your friend and say "I've got an hour to spare, what can I do?" You might suggest ironing, washing the car ... let them know you're ready help.

(Adapted from www.cancer.org 'How To Be A Friend To Someone With Cancer')

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