

## 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 during your treatment and recovery. Also, you may want or need different kinds of support from different people. Support people or co-survivors (family and friends) may come and go, this is normal.

- Informational support — providing you with information about breast cancer. This might include finding facts about your type of breast cancer, gathering information about treatment options or talking to others who have had experiences similar to yours.
- Emotional support — looking after your emotional well-being. This might include listening to you, giving you the chance to express your feelings, giving you a hug or just being there when you need a friend.
- Practical support — helping you with specific tasks. This might include rides to appointments, helping with cooking or cleaning or going to the doctor with you to take notes and provide a second set of ears.



### 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 and coping with breast cancer. Try to surround yourself with people who care and who help give you the strength you need to go through treatment and begin the process of healing. Sometimes it can be hard to ask for support when you really need it. Many women are used to being caregivers, but not receivers. They do not always think to reach outward for support. It may help to remember that people need you as much as you need them. They will feel good, even honored, that you count on them to help you through this difficult time in your life.

### Benefits of support

- reduced anxiety and psychological distress
- reduced depression and feelings of pain
- improved mood, self-image
- improved ability to cope, sexual satisfaction
- improved feelings of control

## Should you join a support group?

A support group can be a key part of your treatment and recovery when you have breast cancer. 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 usually are not 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 self-help groups are run by breast cancer survivors. Support groups are a commitment of time and energy, but those who join them usually agree that it is worth it.

If you dislike sharing your thoughts or feelings in front of a group, you may get more comfort by talking to a partner or close friend. An online support group may be an option for some. CancerCare® offers online support groups for people who have cancer as well as their partners and family members.

## Resources

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®  
1-877-GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)  
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society  
1-800-ACS-2345  
www.cancer.org

CancerCare®  
1-800-813-HOPE  
www.cancercare.org

## Getting support

1. The first step is to write down the names of people who might support you in different ways. Your list might include: your partner, children, other family members, friends, support group, co-workers, clergy, neighbors or health care providers. These people are also called co-survivors. 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 your doctor to give you informational support, your best friend to give you practical support and your partner to give you all three kinds of support.
3. Tell each person exactly what he or she can do to help you. Be specific. You might ask one person to be ready with hugs when you are upset. Another to help with housework and someone else to cut out any newspaper articles related to breast cancer and give them to you.
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.

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- Talking With Your Doctor
- Talking With Your Partner
- When the Diagnosis Is Cancer — An Overview