Has Someone You Know Recently Been Diagnosed with Cancer? Here's What You Can Do

by ALISON RICHARDS

How to Help a Cancer Patient: Supporting Someone Through Cancer

Being diagnosed with cancer is one of the scariest things to deal with in life, so the support you get from family and friends is crucial to helping you through it. Those who are close to you often feel frustrated that they can't make it better, but there are many things they can do in terms of practical and emotional help.

Keep in Touch

One of the best and easiest ways to help someone through cancer is to simply keep in touch. Send them messages regularly, tell them you're thinking of them and offer to help out. When I was going through the various phases of treatments, my friends remembered key dates and sent supportive messages when I was getting test results, starting chemotherapy or radiotherapy, and preparing for surgery. Those messages were so thoughtful whether they were sent by text, a letter, card or bunch of flowers. It really cheered me up, knowing people were there for me if I needed a chat or hug.

Financial Help

Going through cancer treatment can be a massive financial strain for many cancer patients, as their usual work schedule is interrupted. Some people can't work at all during treatment, either due to the nature of their job or if they feel ill with side effects. If you can work, then you may need to reduce your hours or do a different role. Although some employers will continue to pay your salary, many won't, so it can be a worrying time.

Getting together with friends to contribute to a 'wig fund' is a really lovely thing to do to offer some financial support. My friends did this and I used the money for treats during my treatment, such as spa appointments, extra hairdressing trips when my hair was thinning and manicures. All these things made me feel better about my appearance when my body was changing and I didn't feel like myself any more.

Practical Help

There are many ways you can help a cancer patient in simple, practical ways, many of which are free. If they have children then offering with childcare is super helpful, whether it's to give them a break, a day out or cover hospital appointments. The same goes for pets, and offering to walk their dog is a really nice thing to do, especially if they are feeling ill due to side effects.

Collecting prescriptions is another practical form of help, which is just one less thing for a cancer patient to think about. They may be taking multiple medications, and it can be very time consuming to pick up the prescription from the doctor's, take it to the pharmacy, wait for it to be fulfilled or go back later to collect it. If you're feeling below par or trying to juggle work, children and cancer treatment, then having one less thing to think about is a

massive relief.

Housework is another area where you can help out. Offering to do some ironing, cleaning or cooking gives the cancer patient a break when they need it most. Even if they're feeling well, it's nice to spend time doing things other than homemaking. If they're feeling ill though, then cooking for their family or making sure the laundry is done means they can concentrate on getting better.

Spend Time with A Cancer Patient

When you're going through cancer treatment, your friends and family can help you through the hard times. Whether it's going for a walk, having a chat at home or arranging something fun to distract you from what's going on. If you feel up to it physically, then a day out, a meal at a restaurant or other fun activity can really take your mind off what's going on elsewhere in your life.

Offering a massage or a foot rub is another really lovely thing to do for someone with cancer. When I was feeling at my lowest and didn't want to leave my sofa, my Mum or sister would come over and stroke my head which would really relax me and help me nap. Getting enough sleep is vital during cancer treatment, but side effects can interrupt normal sleep patterns. Having enough rest is important for your body to deal with the onslaught of treatments such as chemotherapy, as well as helping mentally.

Helping a Co-worker with Cancer

If you are working with a cancer patient, then there's lots you can do to support them during their treatment and beyond. Your colleague will likely need to attend several hospital appointments, and it's super helpful if you don't bat an eyelid when they ask for more time off. My boss was brilliant and although I always felt super guilty about needing yet another check-up, it really helped that she was supportive.

If a co-worker is going through chemotherapy, then their immunity will be low, so anyone working around them should take extra care during winter if they pick up any colds or flus. One of my teammates asked me how I'd like to be treated, and I said I was happy to move to a more isolated desk if anyone was under the weather. I appreciated being asked and I'm sure my colleagues were happier knowing how to deal with these situations.

How to Help a Cancer Patient: The Bottom Line

I hope some of these tips are useful, because it's tricky to know how to deal with some situations, and I think that getting advice from someone who has been through it is invaluable. I've used my own tips when friends of mine have since been diagnosed.

It's a massive relief when you come out the other side and finish treatment, and hopefully the extra care and attention you've been given will carry on, particularly keeping in touch. I made lots of new friends as a result of what I've been through, which is one positive thing to have come out of a horrible period in my life.