
What to Do When Someone You Know Has Been Diagnosed with Breast Cancer

A diagnosis of breast cancer is a very difficult thing. Women, and men, who hear the words “you have breast cancer” can experience a myriad of emotions: fear, anger, betrayal, powerlessness, resentment, loneliness. More than anything, s/he needs support and encouragement. This is where you can make a difference.

If you are reading this fact sheet, you’re already ahead of the game. Your friend is fortunate in that s/he has someone who cares enough to seek out information to aid in this extremely difficult time.

You can help your loved one and here’s how:

LISTEN—More than anything, newly diagnosed patients need someone to listen. They need to express their fears and they need to process mountains of information. If you need to freak out—and you will—please don’t do it in front of a newly diagnosed person. Talk to another friend instead.

DO offer a shoulder to cry on. At the appropriate time, you might remind her that many people survive diagnosis and many people live to a ripe old age.

DON’T ever say what you would do in her situation. The fact is, you’re not in her situation and you really don’t know what choices you would

make. S/he will need to talk and be heard. Every situation is different. There are many different kinds of breast cancer and many different decisions to make.

DO give advice only when asked. You might instead offer to do research on treatment options and/or for more information on the disease.

DO offer to accompany your friend to doctor appointments. Suggest taping doctor’s discussions. Help prepare a list of questions for the doctor. Doctors give a lot of information during those first appointments.

DO offer to drive your friend to and from treatments.

DO organize friends/family to help with household needs such as, babysitting, housecleaning and food preparation. This will give your friend the personal time she needs right now.

DO get support for yourself when you need to. Do something nice for yourself.

DO join BCA! Help us change the reality that 1 woman out of every 8 will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. Get involved! Join a task force! Everyone can do something—besides worry—about this dreaded disease.