

Tips for supporting a friend who has cancer

When someone you care about receives a cancer diagnosis, it can be a hard pill to swallow. Naturally, you may be filled with a strong desire to try to make their life outside of treatment easier. You want them to know you're here for them.

But good intentions don't always lead to the results you intended. These tips can help you show you care in a way that positively impacts your friend's life.

Ask first

Don't assume you know what's best. Everyone's tastes and needs are different, and they can constantly change – especially during cancer treatment.

Everyone assumes they'll bring a meal or offer to mow the lawn, but you need to ask before doing that. You might have a good idea for a meal, but because of treatment, your friend can't enjoy it. They may have food restrictions or find a particular smell nauseating.

Instead of a meal train, donate a gift card so they can use it on what they want when they want it, or offer to pick up their groceries.

Simply ask, "What can I do for you?" or "How can I help?" Then, follow your friend's lead. And what they need almost always changes during treatment, so keep asking the question.

Initiate the conversation

Some people are self-reliant and aren't comfortable asking for help, even when they badly need it. So, take the lead and offer your help. And keep offering.

Follow through

A common complaint from cancer patients is that people don't follow through for long with their initial promises to help. The cancer battle can be a long one, so try to be engaged with the patient through their difficulties.

Be yourself

Your friend's life has just been upended by a scary diagnosis. With all the treatments and changes they are experiencing, having a friend around who treats them as that same friend from way back helps keep at least some part of life feeling normal.

