



MY FRIEND HAS CANCER

How do I help?



This booklet aims to answer some of the questions you may have when your friend is faced with a cancer diagnosis as an Adolescent or Young Adult (AYA).

Hi!

If you are reading this, you probably have a friend who was just diagnosed with cancer. This may feel a bit overwhelming as you try to figure out how to help your friend navigate what is ahead. It's ok to feel a mix of emotions...sad, angry or just disbelief this is happening to someone you care about. We hope you find the information ahead helpful as you support your friend with cancer. **They are going to need you!**

So let's start at the beginning...

What is Cancer?

To keep it simple, it is when cells in your body multiply too quickly. These can be cells in your blood, bones or really anywhere. We don't know why cancer happens to some people but many doctors and researchers are working hard to figure it out.

How does their medical team help them?

The most common treatments for cancer involve surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation. Surgery helps to remove the cancer and chemotherapy and radiation help destroy cancer cells in different ways.

Your friend is on a treatment protocol for their specific type of cancer. Think of it as a recipe of different medicines (called chemotherapy) and/or radiation (beams of intense energy). Treatment may require frequent visits to the hospital's outpatient clinic or ongoing inpatient admissions (where they have to stay in the hospital overnight) that can last a few days to a few weeks. Total treatment time may be a few months or a few years, depending on the type of cancer. In order to make treatment a little bit easier, your friend may get a "port", which is a device surgically placed in their chest that is used to get chemotherapy or have blood drawn. It's a lot...which is why your friend needs your support in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Sometimes cancer can make things weird between friends.

You might be worried you are going to say or do the wrong thing. The one thing people with cancer want you to know is that they are **still the same person**, just with a new challenge before them. In fact, we know that the worst thing you can do is nothing! People with cancer want to feel supported and connected to their friends. And while that may look a bit different now, it is more important than ever.



There are many ways to be a good friend to someone with cancer.

The most important part of being a good friend is to keep showing up...not just in the beginning but throughout the entire course of their treatment... and you can do that in big and small ways. Even just sending a text on a regular basis lets them know you are thinking about them. You may ask them **"How can I help?"** and they may or may not have an answer. So perhaps you can ask if they want a school/work update, offer to watch a movie, bring over some food, coffee or ice cream or just be there to listen. It's important to keep checking in because how your friend is doing physically and emotionally can change frequently. It is also ok to admit to your friend that you just aren't sure what to say or do. Sometimes just putting that out there allows everyone to take a breath and move forward.

It is helpful to keep in mind that some people are very public about their diagnosis and others only let their inner circle know what's up. Always check in with your friend about what they want shared and what they want to be held in confidence.

If you have read this far, it is clear you care about your friend and want to help. Cancer does change many things but your friendship can remain one of the constants in your friend's life.

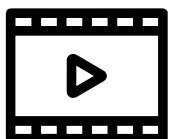
In the words of one of our patients....

"I think that one of the most important things is to make sure that you keep reaching out to your friend. Keep them updated on things going on in school or the friend group and hang out with them.

Also, making sure to be understanding if someone is unable to hang out. Cancer is really hard on your body and can leave you feeling exhausted, so being understanding is key to keeping a friendship.

Something else to keep in mind is that even though someone might look okay, they might not actually be ok. Asking and not making assumptions is important. One thing never to do is to pity someone, it makes us feel weird and incredibly uncomfortable."

RESOURCES



VIDEO SERIES

My Friend Has Cancer?!

A six-part series about how young adults can better support their friends who are dealing with cancer.

www.myfriendhascancer.com

WEBSITE

B-Present

A great resource for friends of young adult cancer patients. They offer a variety of tools and ideas of how to support your friend through treatment and beyond.

www.b-present.org



One last thing...our patients **have shared that the following statements are not helpful to hear when they are having a difficult time.**

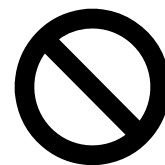
“I know how you feel.”

“You’ll be fine.”

“Don’t worry.”

“You look so different.”

“You’re so brave.”



www.connecticutchildrens.org/aya