

If someone close to you has cancer it can be a difficult time for many people in their life. Cancer can affect all those close to the person as well as the person with the illness. You may feel overwhelmed by the situation which is completely understandable, but it is important to try and support your friend during this time. Regardless of their illness they are still the same person they have always been and will appreciate your friendship as they are trying to recover

## 8 ways to support a friend with cancer

### Visit them when you can

Visiting a friend when they are sick can help brighten their day, especially if they are unable to leave the house or hospital. If you want to visit your friend it is important to contact them first to make sure it suits them for you to visit as they may not always be up for visitors. If they are in hospital you also need to check the visiting hours for the ward that they are on. Avoid visiting if you have a cold or infection but keep in touch by phone and messages.

It may be helpful to visit them at a time that you think others may not, such as mid weekdays or evenings. If you have a group of friends it can be a good idea to try and organise for different people to visit on different days so that your friend can feel supported and have people around them throughout the week.

It is also very important to keep visiting them throughout their treatment and recovery and not just at the beginning. Your friend will need support and friendship while they are sick and it is important you can be there for them without them asking. Equally, try not to show up unannounced too often, or overwhelm them with company. They will be tired, so it is important to find the right balance to respect your friend's privacy.

### Stay in contact

If your friend has cancer and is undergoing treatment they may experience feelings of isolation as they can no longer work, go to school or college, or socialise as they did before. You may not always have the time to visit them in person, but by staying in contact by phone or online you can help the person to feel cared for and connect to you.

You may feel unsure of what to say to your friend but really what is important is that you listen to what they have to say and let them know that you are there to support them. They may want to talk about their cancer and treatment at times but they also may want to talk about regular things that normally do and laugh and joke. Just being there for them and with them is what counts.

## Don't ask what can you do, offer to do something

If you want to do something to help your friend, it is best that you offer ideas rather than ask them what they want or need. People on treatment can be exhausted and may not be able to think of any specifics if you put them on the spot. Instead, come up with a list of suggestions of things you could do to support them and ask them if any suit. If they don't need any of the suggestions they might offer their own, but it is okay if they don't either.

## Be honest about how you are feeling

You may not be sure how to act around your friend now that they are going through something so big in their life. If you feel you have avoided them because you were unsure of what to say or you felt awkward remember that it is never too late to reconnect with them. If you are unsure of what to say let them know that, and reassure them that you love them and want to be there to support them. This may be your first experience of someone close to you being sick, so it is okay if you are unsure of how to act.

It is also okay to express any emotions you may be feeling with regards to their cancer. If you feel scared, angry or sad, you should let your friend know, as they are probably experiencing a lot of the same emotions also.

## Bring them gifts that can help their recovery

If you want to bring your friend who has cancer a gift, you should think about what they can practically use. If they are in hospital think about what they might need. New pyjamas, toiletries, magazines and games can all be practical gifts that the person can use while they recover. Ask them if there is a food or snacks that they miss that they can't get in hospital, or if they are at home, bring them meals that can support their recovery when they don't have the energy to cook.

## Be realistic with what you ask them to do

Many people with cancer will not be in-patients in the hospital, but having treatment on a daily basis and recovering at home. Although they may be spending a lot of time at home that does not mean they are in the same position to leave the house as they used to. Asking them to meet you somewhere or go out with friends may not be realistic. Instead, ask them when it suits for you to come visit and make an effort to go at that time. When you come to visit them, they may have low energy and only want to nap at the couch. Sitting with them and relaxing, even if you just watch tv while they sleep is a nice way that you can support them.

## Give them recommendations

If your friend has cancer they probably have a lot of time where they are at home while they are trying to recover. Giving them recommendations of books, movies and Netflix shows that

they can watch is a nice way to help them pass the time. Reading the same book together can also be a nice way to stay connected and have something new to discuss when you meet up.

## Check in on those close to them

Those close to your friend who has cancer are probably going through a difficult time as they try to support your friend and themselves. Checking in on your friend's partner, family and close friends can take a weight off your friend's mind as they know someone is looking out for the person who is looking after them. Cancer can take a toll on all the people who are affected by it, so it is important to support one another and help each other to get through this difficult time.

Looking for more information on how to support someone with cancer?

- Read Irish Cancer Society's support [How to talk to someone with cancer](#)
- Visit the Irish Cancer Society for more advice on [Talking to family, friends and partners about advanced cancer](#)