

CO-SURVIVORS

How to help those you care about cope with breast cancer





At Susan G. Komen, we consider a person a survivor from the moment a breast cancer diagnosis occurs. Co-survivors are people who lend support to those with breast cancer from diagnosis through treatment and beyond.

It may be hard to know what to say or do when someone has breast cancer, but you know you want to help. Read this resource to learn how to provide different types of social support. You'll also find ways to identify your own needs and take care of yourself.

Who are co-survivors?

Co-survivors are people who lend their support to those with breast cancer. Co-survivors may include:

- Family
- Friends
- Spouses
- Partners
- Children
- Co-workers
- Health care providers
- Support group members
- Spiritual advisors
- Other cancer survivors

As a co-survivor...

You'll want to consider a few things as you think about ways you can help.

- **The survivor's needs.** They can vary and change over time. It's important to check in with the survivor to learn what types of help they need.
- **Your relationship with the survivor.** You may have a close or casual relationship.
- **Your location in relation to the survivor.** You may live across the country, just across town or even in the same house.
- **Your comfort level.** There may be certain types of support you're more comfortable giving than others.

No matter the situation, there are ways you can show your support.

The more you know about living with breast cancer, the more you'll understand what your loved one is going through.

How can you show your support?

There are many ways to support a survivor. Thoughtful gestures big and small mean so much to survivors, whether they've just been diagnosed with breast cancer or completed treatment years ago.

There are three main types of support (also called “social support”):

- Informational
- Emotional
- Practical

Getting social support makes people feel loved, cared for and understood. It may even improve their quality of life. Giving social support can also make you feel good because you're helping a person you care about.

Informational support

Find out all you can about breast cancer. The more you know, the more you can ask questions, be a better listener and find ways to help.

- Ask your loved one what information they need or want
- Get information from the [About Breast Cancer Section](#) and [fact sheets](#) on [komen.org](#)
- Learn common breast cancer [terms](#)
- Learn about [treatment options](#)
- Make a list of [questions to ask the doctor](#)
- Share what you've learned
- Join a Komen Breast Cancer Group on Facebook where those with a connection to breast cancer can share their experiences. There are two groups available: [Komen Breast Cancer Group](#) and [Komen Metastatic Breast Cancer Group](#).
- Contact Komen's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or by email at helpline@komen.org for more information or resources.



Emotional support

A diagnosis of breast cancer can bring a wide range of emotions, including shock, fear, denial, sadness and anger. As your loved one goes through these emotions, you can help them cope with the impact of the diagnosis. Sometimes being there and listening is what helps the most.

- Be present and listen
- Let your loved one express their feelings
- Spend time together – in person, by phone or by video call
- Give a hug
- Send a card
- Say “I love you”

Practical support

In addition to informational and emotional support, you may be able to help in other ways. You may offer to:

- Cook or clean
- Do laundry
- Provide child care
- Walk the dog
- Run errands
- Go food shopping
- Pick up prescriptions
- Drive to the doctor's office

Stories of support

Strength comes in numbers. Go to [komen.org/share-your-story](https://www.komen.org/share-your-story) to read stories of hope and encouragement from other co-survivors.

For help finding a support group, contact the Komen Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or by email at helpline@komen.org

A partner, a co-survivor ▶

“I never thought my partner could get breast cancer. When his doctor told him about his diagnosis and treatment plan, I knew I was not able to understand what he was going through. I started looking for support groups for men with breast cancer. We found an organization where he was able to talk with other male breast cancer survivors. Talking to other male survivors has helped him cope. I would encourage anyone to ask their health care team about options for support.”



◀ Being a friend, being a co-survivor

“My friend Jackie and I are close. When she told me she had breast cancer, I knew I wanted to be there for her. I gathered information, helped her make a list of questions for her doctor and drove her to appointments. When Jackie isn't feeling well, other friends and I help her at home with cooking, cleaning and doing laundry. We're also there to listen to her when she is feeling down. It's small stuff really, but Jackie calls us her lifeline. I think we're just being her friends.”

A husband, a co-survivor ▶

“When we first found out my wife, Heather, had breast cancer, I started doing research online. I turned to trusted organizations, such as Susan G. Komen, so I could prepare as much as possible. I'm the planner in our family, so I kept our calendar organized and asked people for help when we needed it. My wife told me it also helped when we spent time together. I would listen to her talk about her diagnosis when she needed to. We're a team.”





Get support and connect with other co-survivors, even when far away. ▼

“My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer while I was in training for the military. I was far away from home and worried about her. I felt helpless. But I was relieved to know she had our family, her friends and coworkers supporting her. I was also able to connect with other co-survivors through online support groups. The online support helped me get through this tough time.”

Co-workers can be co-survivors ▲

“Lacey is the glue that holds our department together. When we learned she had breast cancer our staff wanted to offer support. Some of us drop off meals. Others run errands for her. We all send her cards to show her we are thinking about her. Lacey always says she feels cared for by all of us.”

Visit [komen.org/cosurvivor](https://www.komen.org/cosurvivor) for more information.





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1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)

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