

For people in committed relationships, a diagnosis of cancer can challenge even the most solid relationship. People with cancer can often feel alone or that “no one understands what I am going through” while at the same time, spouses and partners can feel helpless and unsure of what to say and do. It is important that you stay connected with your spouse or partner during this time but it is also normal if your relationship is feeling the stress and strain of cancer and its treatment.

Communication is the key. We often think that those who love us can anticipate our needs and wants, but the reality is that both you and your partner need to share your thoughts and feelings and listen to each other. Be open and honest when communicating with your partner and ask them to do the same. Let them know if something they are doing is making you feel more isolated or adding to your stress. Do the same for them. Open communication can bring you closer and serve to improve and deepen your relationship. Improved communication can have a positive effect on your relationship as a whole and can also help solve many of the problems you will face as you go through your cancer journey as a couple.

Couples may experience many changes in their relationship as a result of a cancer diagnosis. Changes in roles and responsibilities such as child care, housework, paying bills, working outside the home, or providing physical care can feel overwhelming and frustrating. These changes can also cause feelings of sadness and loss. Changes can also lead to a better understanding of your partner’s experience and deepen the appreciation you feel. Talking about how you are feeling will help keep you connected to your partner and ease the sense of isolation either partner can feel. Set aside a “date night” or other time to be together as a couple to do something fun for just the two of you.

Physical closeness with your partner is another element of intimate relationships. The simple act of a touch, holding hands, or a hug can create feelings of connectedness. Physical contact can help lessen your sense of isolation and improve your sense of well-being. A diagnosis of cancer as well as the physical and emotional effects of cancer treatment often affects sexuality. Problems such as concern about physical appearance, depression, fatigue, and other treatment side effects lower sex



[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)  
1-888-793-9355



drive or make intercourse difficult or impossible. Both partners may feel anxious about their sexual relationship but may be reluctant to talk about their feelings. Tell your partner how you are feeling and find ways to maintain intimacy through gentle touching, kissing, and physical closeness. For more information about intimacy changes during cancer treatment, visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/intimacy-sex-and-fertility-issues](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/intimacy-sex-and-fertility-issues).

Above all, know that many couples navigate cancer and its treatment well. Of course, as in any relationship during stressful times, there will be ups and downs. If you think it would be helpful to seek counseling for you and your partner, talk with your health care provider, clergy, or oncology social worker for suggestions about finding the support that you need.

# General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

**Cancer Support Community** • 888-793-9355 • [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)

**American Cancer Society** • 800-227-2345 • [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**CancerCare** • 800-813-4673 • [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

**Cancer.net** • 888-651-3038 • [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Caregiver Action Network** • 855-227-3640 • [www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

**Healthcare.gov** • [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

**Livestrong Foundation** • 866-673-7205 • [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

**National Cancer Institute** • 800-422-6237 • [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine** • 888-644-6226 • [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

**Patient Advocate Foundation** • 800-532-5274 • [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

## CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Cancer Support Community's (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org) for more info.

**Cancer Support Helpline**®—Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon–Fri, 9 am–9 pm ET.

**Open to Options**®—Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

**Frankly Speaking About Cancer**®—Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer).

**Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs**—With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation).

**MyLifeLine**—CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Connect with other caregivers by joining the Caregiver Support online discussion board. Sign up at [www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org).

**Grassroots Network**—Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate).

**Cancer Experience Registry**®—Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at [www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org).

The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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