

CO-SURVIVORS

How to help those you care about cope with breast cancer





It may be hard to know what to say or do when someone has breast cancer, but you know you want to help. At Susan G. Komen® we call you a “co-survivor.”

Read this brochure to learn how to offer support. Also find ways to take care of yourself during this time.

The more you know, the more you can help. You will find information and easy-to-read fact sheets on our website. Just go to komen.org/cosurvivor or call our breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636).

Who are co-survivors?

Co-survivors are people who lend support to those with breast cancer from diagnosis through treatment and beyond. Co-survivors may include:

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

How can you show your support?

There are many ways to support someone with breast cancer. Thoughtful gestures big and small mean so much, whether they've just been diagnosed or completed treatment years ago. By giving support you show strength and love.

There are three main types of support: informational, emotional and practical. This “social support” makes people feel loved, cared for and understood. It may even improve their quality of life.

Here are ways you can help:

Informational support

Find out all you can about breast cancer.

The more you know, the more you can help.

- Learn common breast cancer terms
- Learn about treatment options
- [Make a list of questions to ask the doctor](#)
- Gather information for your loved one and share what you've learned
- Get helpful information from the About Breast Cancer section on komen.org
- Join the Komen Breast Cancer Group on Facebook – a place for those with breast cancer, their family members and friends as well as those at risk of developing breast cancer.
- Call Komen's breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)

Emotional support

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



- Just listen
- Spend time together
- Let your loved one express their feelings
- Give a hug
- Say “I love you”

Practical support

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

- Cook or clean
- Drive to the doctor's office
- Do laundry
- Send a note
- Provide childcare
- Pick up prescriptions
- Go food shopping
- Run errands – wash the car or get the oil changed
- Walk the dog

There are many resources that help family, friends, neighbors and co-workers show their support.

By going to www.komen.org/cosurvivor, you can get tips from other co-survivors on what to do or what to say to your loved one. Learn how to create a network of support to assist your loved one.

Other ways I can help:

Co-survivors need help too!

You may be so busy caring for your loved one's needs that you neglect your own. Ask yourself, do I need:

- Someone to listen to me?
- Information about my own risk of breast cancer?
- Help caring for my loved one?
- Financial help?
- Others to pray for me and my family?
- To set aside some time for myself?

Now that you know areas where you could use some help, the next step is getting it! The best way to take care of your loved one is to make sure you take care of yourself. If not, you may get worn out. Reach out to others to get the support you need. Sometimes all it takes is asking. By going to www.komen.org, you can read more about how you can get support.



Stories of support

Strength comes in numbers. Go to komen.org/cosurvivor to read stories of hope and encouragement from other co-survivors.

Susan G. Komen® offers a free, 6-week telephone support group for men with breast cancer. To learn more, call the Komen Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or email helpline@komen.org

A wife, a co-survivor ▶

“I never thought my husband could get breast cancer. He said he felt embarrassed since breast cancer is supposed to be a woman’s disease. Since I was not able to understand what he was going through, I started searching for support groups for men with breast cancer so he could have someone to talk to who understands. We found an organization where we were able to talk with a male breast cancer survivor and talking to him really helped him cope. I would encourage anyone to ask their medical team about support for men with breast cancer.”



◀ Being a friend, being a co-survivor

“My neighbor Jackie and I are close. When she told me she had breast cancer I knew we would go through this together. We researched her treatment options. I drive her to radiation therapy and cook when she doesn’t feel up to it. I listen to her when she gets down. It’s small stuff, really, but Jackie calls me her lifeline. She says her support group leader calls me a co-survivor. I just call myself her friend.”

A husband, a co-survivor ▶

“We found out my wife, Tanya, had breast cancer last winter and she had her breast removed a month later. She has a great spirit, even though the side effects from treatment leave her tired and sick many days. We find going to the support group at our hospital helps us face this challenge together. We are a team.”





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

“My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer while I was deployed in Iraq. I was so far away and worried about her. I felt helpless. But I was relieved to know she had many friends and colleagues supporting her. Just knowing that was a relief to me. I was also able to connect with other co-survivors through online support groups. The online support helped me get through this difficult 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. Two of us drive Lacey to doctor visits. We all send her cards to show we are thinking about her. Co-workers can be co-survivors for the people they care about.”

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





Susan G. Komen developed a co-survivor ribbon that combines the pink ribbon — the universal symbol for breast cancer awareness — with the color white to recognize the relationship between breast cancer survivors and their co-survivors. This special pink and white ribbon has become the symbol of the co-survivor.



1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

Susan G. Komen does not provide medical advice.
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