

Supporting a Loved One With Metastatic Breast Cancer: Caregiving Tips for Men

Living with metastatic breast cancer presents many challenges, both for the women who is diagnosed and for her caregivers. There are many ways to help and support a woman with metastatic breast cancer. Because caregiving can be stressful, it's important that you take care of yourself, too.



Here are some tips on how you can care for both your loved one with breast cancer and yourself:

Communicate with your loved one. If you're unsure about something, ask. Share your feelings, and listen when she wants to talk about her feelings. You don't have to offer opinions or solutions – just lend a caring ear.

Respect her decisions. Even if you are in a position to share decision-making, remember that it is she who is facing cancer and its treatment. Decisions about her care and her life are ultimately hers to make. It's also important to let her decide what role she wants to continue to have in the family, and where she would like to have help.

Ask how you can help with medical matters. Would your loved one like you to come with her to her medical appointments? It can be helpful to have someone to take notes during visits to the doctor. Or perhaps you can help by keeping a calendar of her appointments. Ask your loved one how she would like you to be involved in her health care.

Offer to take responsibility for practical needs. Driving to medical appointments, filling prescriptions, doing household chores – offer to do some of these tasks yourself, or ask family members and friends if they can pitch in and help. Community organizations that provide support for people with cancer may be able to offer volunteer drivers, respite care, and other services. Talk to a social worker about what kind of help may be available in your community.

Volunteer to manage the financial paperwork. Your loved one's cancer treatment will generate a lot of paperwork. You can help her cope by offering to take care of medical records, bills, insurance claims, and so on.

Know your rights. Talk with a social worker about benefits for which you or your loved one may qualify. For example, under the Family and Medical Leave Act (a federal law), you may be entitled to unpaid leave from your job in order to care for your loved one.

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Give your loved one “space” for emotional ups and downs. Living with metastatic breast cancer can be an emotional roller-coaster ride. Understand that your loved one will have good days and bad days. Reassure her of your continued love for her.

Help her find ways to look and feel her best. A woman with metastatic breast cancer may feel self-conscious about changes to her appearance caused by treatment. Encourage your loved one to learn about options for coping with physical changes and to try different solutions until she finds what makes her most comfortable.



Talk to her about her comfort level with physical intimacy. A woman with metastatic breast cancer may have conflicting feelings about physical closeness. Ask your loved one how much closeness she needs and feels comfortable with. Hugging and holding hands can be simple ways of staying physically connected.

Take time to care for yourself. While caregiving is often rewarding, it can sometimes feel like a full-time job. Plan a few moments to do something for yourself each day, even if it’s just taking a walk around the block. It’s normal for a caregiver to feel helpless or angry sometimes. Allow yourself to experience and accept your feelings. If some of your emotions are too difficult to cope with, speak with a professional counselor or oncology social worker. CancerCare offers free individual counseling for both people with cancer and their caregivers.

Join a support group. Support groups let you connect with others going through similar situations. They give you a chance to talk about the challenges or rewards of caregiving, for example, and to share tips and resources with other members. CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare’s professional oncology social workers are available to help you and your loved one cope with the challenges raised by metastatic breast cancer. Our services, which include counseling, education, financial assistance, and practical help, are completely free of charge. To learn more, call us at **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit **www.cancercare.org**.

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