

WELL BALANCED^o

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Cancer Awareness



October is breast cancer awareness month and reminds us of the profound burden of cancer, which impacts not only those diagnosed, but also their loved ones, colleagues, and caregivers. The National Cancer Institute reports that in 2024, an estimated 2,001,140 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in the United States alone. Approximately 40.5% of men and women will be diagnosed with cancer at some point during their lifetimes.

Despite the prevalence of cancer, many of us struggle with knowing what to do or say to express our support for those facing a diagnosis. Cancer impacts every area of a person's life, including work. If you know a coworker or a loved one who has been diagnosed with cancer, continue reading to find helpful tips and resources to help you best support them as they undergo treatment and beyond.

» Do Your Research

When someone in your life has been diagnosed with cancer, it can be helpful to learn all you can about cancer and their specific disease. While we've all heard of cancer, that does not mean we understand it. Doing some research on the topic from reputable sources can help inform the best ways to physically, emotionally, and socially support and empathize with the person going through treatment as well as give you an idea of what they may be experiencing day-to-day.



Want more cancer resources?

Talk to your employer to find out what is available to you through your employee assistance program (EAP), employee resource groups (ERGs), or workplace wellness program.

For Caregivers:

Caregiving, while rewarding, can take a toll on personal wellness. Make an effort to care for yourself by keeping up with personal hobbies, taking regular breaks, and reaching out to others for help when needed. Go to www.helpforcancer caregivers.org to find more resources for caregivers.

» Express Your Support

There are many ways to support those with cancer, but it can be difficult to know where to start. "How can I help?" is a big question that can place a burden on them—Instead, ask about specific things you can do to lighten the load. Come prepared with actionable suggestions, like taking important meeting notes for them, or offering to pick up mail or prepare a meal. Small gift baskets including helpful items like gift cards, blankets, and other comfort items can make a person feel supported. Even simple things, like a "miss you" card, can brighten a person's day. At work, you may be asked (or offer) to take on some additional responsibilities as workloads shift to accommodate a colleague going through treatment. Ensure you have the capacity to take on this work in order to avoid burnout yourself. Remember—You are just one part of an individual's support network. Do not feel obligated to forego your own needs in caring for another.

» Know What to Say

When someone you know is diagnosed with cancer, it is important to know what kinds of things to say (and what not to say). These can be difficult interactions to navigate, and everyone is different. Simply let the person know you are thinking of them by sharing simple, heartfelt sentiments or asking respectful questions that let

them know you care. Even acknowledging that you aren't sure what to say is an understandable response. Let the person with cancer guide the discussion. Steer clear from assumptive statements like "I know how you feel" or "You'll be fine," and do not compare situations, as these responses can be dismissive of the person's anxieties about their diagnosis. Do not offer medical advice; you are not their doctor, and oftentimes adding suggestions can confuse, cause doubt, or lead an individual towards misinformed medical treatment. Avoid letting the topic of cancer dominate every conversation you have with them—Everyday topics of discussion and maintaining a sense of humor can go a long way in helping a person with cancer feel a bit more normal.

» Maintain Boundaries

Although it is natural to want to do everything we can to help those we know in treatment, it is also important to maintain boundaries. Any medical diagnosis is a sensitive topic and should be kept confidential; do not share the news without explicit permission from the person with cancer. Even if you have a very close relationship with the sick person, do not drop in to their home unannounced



Coping With Hard News?

Learning of a cancer diagnosis, even if you are not the one who is sick, can impact your mental well-being. You may experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, and stress. If you are having trouble dealing with this difficult news, reach out to counseling services or support groups through your workplace employee assistance programs (EAP).

or deliver food without asking. Oftentimes, those undergoing chemotherapy have periods of fatigue and may not want to spend time socializing with others. Be respectful of a cancer patient's immune system—Do not spend time with them if you are sick, and be conscious of maintaining good hygiene practices in the office.

» Post-Treatment Care

After a cancer patient's treatment ends, they may still need support. Be prepared to step in and assist with select projects and workloads as they attend regular follow-up appointments or additional treatments. Illnesses like cancer take a toll. It may take some time for the person to feel "normal" again, both physically and mentally. Ensure you continue showing your support for their condition as they continue to heal.

If you are experiencing cancer, know that you have a network of support to lean on as you undergo treatment and recovery, including friends, family, colleagues, and loved ones. Even so, the thought of work can be extremely stressful when first diagnosed. Decisions of whether or not to continue working through your illness and how you will share the news with your boss, coworkers, and direct reports can be overwhelming. Find resources for managing cancer at work at www.cancerandcareers.org.

Additional Resources:

- » Cancer in the Workplace Tip Sheet (cancer.org)
- » Resources for Coworkers (cancerandcareers.org)
- » Workplace Protections for Individuals Impacted by Cancer (dol.gov)

