

A Newsletter Dedicated to Helping You Take a More Active Role in Your Healthcare

# How to Support a Loved One with Breast Cancer



October 2009

*This month's issue of eMBrace will focus on how living with breast cancer presents many challenges, both for the woman who is diagnosed and for her caregivers. There are many ways to help and support a woman with breast cancer. Because care-giving can be stressful, it's important that you take care of yourself, too. Below are some helpful 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 they want to talk about their 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 they are the one facing cancer and treatment. Decisions about care and life are ultimately theirs to make.

**Ask how you can help with medical matters.** Would your loved one like you to come with them to their 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 their appointments.

**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. Talk to a social worker about what kind of help may be available in your community.

**Give your loved one “space” for emotional ups and downs.** Living with 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 continual love for her.

**Help her find ways to look and feel her best.** A woman with 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.

**Take time to care for yourself.** While care-giving 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.

**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 care-giving, for example, and to share tips and resources with other group members.

*In conclusion, these are just a few things you can do to help your loved one that has been diagnosed with breast cancer. They all seem like small tasks, but those are what will really matter to your loved one when they are feeling down.*

Source: [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

*Since October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month, you can expect to see tons of articles that give you information on how to prevent the disease, the signs and symptoms and the likely causes.*