

# Be Your Own Advocate



## Your Support System

Following a diagnosis of cancer, you may find support from family, friends and loved ones who rally around you. Or you may choose to keep your diagnosis and treatment very private. How you choose to deal with your diagnosis and treatment is an extremely individual choice. However, there may be times when extra support is needed. A support system can help with a variety of needs, from practical tasks like housekeeping, meal preparation and navigating insurance issues to emotional support that may involve an attentive ear to listen to your concerns. Your support system may be composed of friends, family and organizations with experience in helping people through medical challenges.

### Members of your support system can help you by:

- Helping with day-to-day needs (meal preparation, housekeeping, laundry, etc.)
- Setting up child care services or transportation
- Researching information and finding services you need
- Finding help for insurance and financial matters
- Helping keep track of your healthcare needs and appointments
- Talking with your healthcare team on your behalf, particularly at times when you may not feel physically and emotionally up to the task yourself
- Being a supportive listener if you need help to solve a problem or if you feel the need to share concerns about the impact of your diagnosis and treatment on your day-to-day life

### Organizing Your Support System

Although it might be difficult or uncomfortable to ask for help, you will find that most people feel good about helping others, particularly if that person is a family member, friend or neighbor who cares about you! Remember that in a similar situation you would probably want to do the same thing for a family member or loved one!

To foster appropriate personal boundaries and to make sure you're getting help with what you really need, here are some ideas for organizing your support system:

- Create a list of tasks that others can help you complete.
- Make a list of people who can provide help and support.
- Contact your list of potential support system members; ask when and how they would be willing to help.
- Create a schedule with dates, times, tasks and names of people who have agreed to help (see our sample schedule).
- Keep the schedule and share copies with your support system members.

The chart on pages 2.2 - 2.3 can help you to organize the tasks for which you need help, who can assist you and when assistance is needed.

### Online Resources to Assist with Your Support System

There are also a number of online resources that let you create web pages to keep friends and family updated on your health status, share any needs you might have and allow these important people to send you words of encouragement. Included below are a few examples. Also, please see the "Resources" section of this guidebook for other useful referrals and resources.

#### Lotsa Helping Hands

[www.lotsahelpinghands.com](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com)

Lotsa Helping Hands is a simple, immediate way for friends, family, colleagues and neighbors to assist loved ones in need.

It's an easy-to-use, private group calendar, specifically designed for organizing helpers, where everyone can pitch in with meal delivery, rides and other tasks necessary for life to run smoothly during times of medical crisis, end-of-life caring, or family caregiver exhaustion. It's also a place to keep these 'circles of community' informed with status updates, photo galleries, message boards, and more.

#### CarePages

[www.carepages.com](http://www.carepages.com)

CarePages.com is an online community of people who come together to share the challenges, hopes and triumphs of anyone facing a life-changing health event. Through personalized websites, members can relate their stories, post photos and update friends and family instantly. In turn, people who care send messages of love and encouragement. CarePages.com also offers a variety of resources and support tools for living a more compassionate life.

#### CaringBridge

[www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)

CaringBridge provides free websites that connect people experiencing a significant health challenge to family and friends, making each health journey easier. CaringBridge websites offer a personal and private space to communicate and show support, saving time and emotional energy when health matters most. The websites are easy to create and use. Authors add health updates and photos to share their story while visitors leave messages of love, hope and compassion in the guestbook.

## Support System Organizing Chart

Help Needed	Days Help is Needed	Times Help is Needed	Helper's Name/ Contact Information	Notes/Instructions
Accompany to Medical Appointments				
Caregiving				
Child Care				
Cleaning/ Household Chores				
Help with Insurance Questions				
Help with Bill Payment Questions				

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Accompany to Medical Appointments				
Caregiving				
Child Care				
Cleaning/ Household Chores				
Help with Insurance Questions				
Help with Bill Payment Questions				

## Important Contact Information for Members of Your Support Team

This information may come in handy if members need to contact each other pertaining to their care assignments.

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Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

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