



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)  
info@cancer.org  
www.cancer.org

# fact sheet

## COPING WITH CANCER WHEN YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN: HOW TO GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

**Coping with cancer can be difficult, even when you have a partner who is there to support you. But what happens when you don't? When you're single and living alone? Having supportive friends and family nearby can help, but it's not always the same. However it's important to know that you still don't have to face cancer alone.**



There are over 100 million adults in the U.S. who are single (whether divorced, widowed, or never married), and more than 30 million of them live on their own.<sup>1</sup> Even if you're not in a romantic relationship or don't have a committed partner, you still deserve support. There are many ways to receive the support you need. You might get this from extended family members, who could play a bigger role in your life at this time. Or, you could rely more on friends from all areas of your life, whether you feel very close to them or not.

Sometimes, we may need to take the first step to initiate a request for practical help or emotional support from people we might not think to ask during ordinary circumstances. This can be difficult for people who are used to living independently. This is the time, however, to open up and let people know how you're feeling. You could start by identifying ways in which they can be most helpful to you, on a practical level:

- Invite people to become part of your caregiving network by asking them to do specific things (e.g., driving you to your treatment appointment, bringing you a meal). There are online tools to help you do this, such as My Cancer Circle – ([www.mycancercircle.net](http://www.mycancercircle.net).) Remember that people like to feel useful!
- Or, you might invite your friends and family to your home for a meeting, and ask each of them how they can best support you:
  - Can they provide something concrete, like child care or dog-walking, or are they the people you call when you simply need a listening ear? Different people can provide different types of care.
- Ask someone in your circle to become your health care proxy. This doesn't have to be your best friend, but someone who clearly understands your health care wishes and whom you trust to carry them out in the event that you cannot.

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- Ask your friends, family, neighbors, or coworkers if you can list them as emergency contacts, and then post their names and contact information on a visible place inside your home (refrigerator, back of your door, etc.). You might also want to give one of your contacts a key to your home.
- Call 311 or look up your town or city's homepage on the Internet to locate a volunteer network in your area that provides "homemaking" services (light house-cleaning, transportation, meal preparation, laundry, errands, shopping).
- Talk to a hospital social worker or patient navigator about planning for short or long-term care, if needed, or learn about in-home care from the Visiting Nurse Association ([www.vnaa.org](http://www.vnaa.org)).



Support is not just practical but also emotional and social. Be creative: it's okay to expand your circle. For example, who among your neighbors can you call for a chat? Do you belong to a church, temple, mosque, or other type of spiritual community? Whether attending a service, doing yoga, or walking in nature, the ability to reflect and connect with something outside of yourself can be very healing. You might also consider joining a support group in-person, by phone, or online. People often find that support groups offer a sense of camaraderie and encouragement, inspire new ways of coping, and help them feel less isolated.

You might find a sense of companionship in pursuit of a hobby: joining a group that's organized around an activity you already enjoy (music, art, meditation) helps you connect with others based on

shared interests. Creativity also fosters a sense of mindfulness and living in the moment.

Be mindful of what you say to yourself about being single. You might think, "I can't stand this. I must have a partner to help me cope with cancer. It's impossible to do it on my own." Be kinder and gentler with yourself. It might be more helpful to say, "I would prefer to have a partner or spouse who could help me with this, but it's not absolutely necessary. It might make things easier, but I can ask for help and support. I have handled difficult situations in the past and will do it again."

Being single does not have to mean coping with cancer alone. Having cancer can be daunting and requires making a lot of decisions all at once. Not having a spouse or partner might make it harder, but you don't have to deal with your fears and make those decisions on your own. It's okay to ask for support from the people around you, or to find new sources of support. You might be single, but you're not alone.

### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2014

*Edited by Maria Chi, LCSW*



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National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001