



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER

A metastatic breast cancer diagnosis affects not only the person who is diagnosed, but also their caregiver. The many medical, emotional and practical challenges caregivers may face can lead to stress and burnout, which impacts the care your loved one receives. That is why it is important to know there are many ways to help and support your loved one while caring for yourself as well.



### TIPS ON HOW YOU CAN PROVIDE THE BEST CARE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE COPING WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER:

#### **Communicate with your loved one.**

Share your feelings, even those you may feel uncomfortable sharing. Talking about emotions might be hard at times. But when you share what you are feeling with a loved one, you help them feel supported and give them the opportunity to support you. Listen when they want to talk about their feelings; you don't have to offer opinions or solutions—just a caring ear. If you're unsure about something, just ask.

#### **Help your loved one with practical needs.**

Support your loved one by taking care of practical tasks such as driving to appointments, organizing paperwork, filling prescriptions or doing household chores. Friends and family members may want to pitch in as well. Organizations in your community may be able to offer volunteer transportation, respite care and other services. The professional oncology social workers at

CancerCare can also direct you to resources that may be available in your community. Read CancerCare's fact sheet, "Managing Practical Concerns Raised by Metastatic Breast Cancer," to learn more.

**Help your loved one find ways to look and feel their best.** A person coping with metastatic breast cancer may feel self-conscious about changes to their appearance caused by treatment. Encourage your loved one to learn about options available for coping with physical changes. Give them time to try different solutions. For women, an example of this would be finding a breast prostheses and wig that they feel comfortable with, and for men it may be a wig or head bandana/cap. Read CancerCare's fact sheets, "Helping Your Loved One or Child Cope with Hair Loss" and "Prostheses Resources," to learn more.

**Talk to them about their comfort level with physical closeness and intimacy.** A cancer diagnosis can change the way your loved one feels about physical intimacy. Ask them how much closeness they need and

(over)

their comfort level. Hugging and holding hands can be simple ways of staying physically and emotionally connected. Read CancerCare's fact sheet titled, "Intimacy During and After Cancer Treatment" for more information.

**Understand that your loved one will have good days and bad days.** Living with metastatic breast cancer can feel like an emotional roller coaster. Give your loved one space for emotional ups and downs.

**Respect their decisions.** Even if you are in a position to share decision making, keep in mind that your loved one is the person facing cancer and treatment. Decisions about their care and life are ultimately theirs to make. It is up to them to decide what role they want to continue to have in the family, and where they would like to have help.

**It is also important to take time to care for yourself as you care for a loved one.** While caregiving can be a rewarding experience, it can also feel like a draining, full-time job. Take some time each day to do something for yourself, even something as simple as taking a walk around the block.

**It is normal for caregivers to sometimes feel angry, anxious or helpless.** Allow yourself to accept these feelings. It can be helpful to speak with a professional counselor or social worker to help you cope with difficult emotions. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers provide individual counseling for people with cancer and their caregivers, and also lead support groups that are available in person, over the telephone, and online.



### **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.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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