



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

COPING WITH CANCER AS A VETERAN

As a veteran, you served your country. You stayed ready and fit and did what you were asked to do. Your diagnosis of cancer may have come as a shock. There is no one to blame for a cancer diagnosis. Instead, it is important to focus on taking care of yourself. This involves listening to doctors, being open to treatment and letting yourself depend on your loved ones.

THE STRENGTH OF BEING A VETERAN

In the armed forces, you were likely encouraged to adopt a sense of discipline and selfless devotion to your unit and others. You were likely expected to put your own desires aside and endure pain and discomfort for the benefit of others.

These qualities can be significant strengths, but when it comes to your personal health, they can sometimes make it harder to find the care you need. There are many forms of treatment for cancer available, depending on what type of cancer you have. Your health care team is there to guide you in making informed decisions about what to do.

There is nothing wrong with “letting your guard down.” Being vulnerable, physically or emotionally, is not a sign of weakness. The most vital thing right now is to seek the care you need and remain open to the best solutions you can find. In fact, this can help you take care of those who depend on you.

LETTING OTHERS SUPPORT YOU

It can be difficult to feel like you are not in control of your situation. A diagnosis of cancer brings a great deal of uncertainty about its impact on your life and future. Cancer can be a demanding illness, and you may not be used to showing your needs, even to those you most love. To maintain your quality of life, you may need to start depending more on other people. Again, it's important to remember that this is not a sign of weakness.



There is nothing wrong with asking for help. In fact, loved ones are often eager to help however they can. Try finding a close friend or family member whom you're comfortable talking to. Health care professionals, such as social workers, can also be a sounding board. These conversations can help you release anxiety or other pressures related to your situation. Sharing these thoughts can help you cope better with your diagnosis in the long term, rather than letting them build up inside of you.

If you are not ready to share how you are feeling, there may be practical tasks that loved ones can help with. You might try asking a family member to drop off dinner once a week, or ask a friend to drive you to an appointment. Even tasks not related to your care can help. Asking someone to care for your pet or help with household chores can help you focus on your health.

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A cancer diagnosis changes many things, including your relationships with those around you. For information on how to speak with your loved ones, please read our fact sheet “Communicating With Your Caregivers and Loved Ones.” You may also give them our fact sheet “Caring for a Veteran With Cancer.”

SEEKING PRACTICAL SUPPORT

In addition to the direct care you may receive from your nurses and doctors, there are agencies and organizations that can also help. Practical resources can take many forms. These range from housing for you and your loved ones during treatment to vocational rehabilitation and more. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is a good place to start. They can be contacted at 800-827-1000 or online at <https://www.va.gov/>.

For more listings, please read our fact sheet “Building Connections as a Veteran: Resources and Support.” You can also call CancerCare’s Hopeline at 800-813-HOPE (4673).

SEEKING EMOTIONAL HELP

Many emotions can come from a cancer diagnosis, including anger, frustration and sadness. You do not have to experience this alone. Fortunately, there are ways to find others who share your experience, both directly or as loved ones. These include support groups offered by CancerCare. Led by a professional oncology social worker, support groups offer space to discuss diagnosis-specific issues, treatment side effects, emotional concerns and more.

CancerCare’s oncology social workers are available to help in various ways. These include cancer-focused counseling in the New York and New Jersey area, national case management services over the phone, along with a variety of national online support groups. They can direct you to resources such as educational workshops, financial assistance and more. Please call CancerCare’s Hopeline at 800-813-HOPE (4673) to reach someone who can help.



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 case management, 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 master’s-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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