

## Practical Ways to Help Those with Cancer

One of my recent columns cautioned against giving unsolicited advice to friends who have cancer.

A reader called and said, “OK, I won’t give unsolicited advice. But what *can* I do to help my neighbor who just found out she has cancer?”

It’s a great question.

I began my answer with a preface: don’t expect to make things all better. You can’t. But you can always do something to make life better for your friend on any given day:

- Drive her to doctor appointments or treatments.
- Drop off a meal that can be easily frozen for future use.
- If she wants to talk about cancer, let her do so without interruption.
- If she does not want to talk about cancer, take her to a movie.
- Offer to organize other friends who also want to help by cooking or driving.
- If many calls are expected, offer to answer the phone and relay information.
- If she’s a neighbor, just go ahead and cut her grass, weed her garden, or fill her birdfeeders.
- Offer to do research. It can be as

straightforward as calling around to see which store in the area has the best price for an item that she’ll need.

- Take walks with her.
- Buy her a 6 month subscription to Netflix.
- Offer to watch her kids for an evening or weekend.
- Write her notes of encouragement and support, especially later in her treatment when others write less often.
- Send photos and other reminders of happy times together.
- Send small gifts – a favorite book or CD.

Don’t take offense if your friend doesn’t call you back right away. Being treated for cancer is a full-time job that uses up a lot of energy. Take the initiative for staying in touch.

Understand that your friend’s needs and wishes will change during treatment and recovery. If she doesn’t want to go out for lunch now, ask again next month. And the month after.

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