

Support Resources

Patient Education Resource

A cancer diagnosis affects more than just your body — it impacts your emotions, relationships, and daily life. You do not have to navigate this journey alone. This guide highlights resources available to help you, your family, and your caregivers find the support you need.

1. Local Support Groups

Connecting with others who understand what you are going through can be tremendously helpful. Many hospitals and cancer centers offer:

- **Disease-specific groups:** Groups focused on colorectal, pancreatic, liver, or other specific cancers — led by trained facilitators or social workers
- **General cancer support groups:** Open to patients with any cancer type; focus on shared experiences, coping strategies, and emotional support
- **Caregiver support groups:** Dedicated to family members and friends supporting a loved one with cancer
- **Ostomy support groups:** For patients adjusting to life with an ostomy — practical tips, emotional support, and peer mentoring

Ask your care team's social worker or patient navigator for a list of groups meeting near you.

2. Counseling Options

Professional counseling can help you and your family process the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis:

- **Oncology social workers:** Available at most cancer centers — provide emotional support, help with practical concerns (insurance, transportation, financial assistance), and connect you with community resources
- **Licensed counselors and psychologists:** Individual therapy (in-person or telehealth) to address anxiety, depression, grief, and adjustment challenges
- **Psychiatry:** If you experience significant depression, anxiety, or sleep disturbance, a psychiatrist can evaluate whether medication may be helpful alongside therapy
- **Spiritual care / chaplaincy:** Many hospitals offer spiritual care services regardless of religious affiliation — available for reflection, comfort, and meaning-making

There is no wrong time to ask for help. Many patients find that talking to a professional early in their journey helps build coping strategies for the road ahead.

3. Survivorship Programs

Survivorship begins the day you are diagnosed and continues for the rest of your life. Structured survivorship programs help you transition from active treatment to long-term wellness:

- **Survivorship care plan:** A written summary of your diagnosis, treatments received, and a personalized follow-up schedule — ask your oncology team for yours
- **Wellness and rehabilitation:** Exercise programs, physical therapy, and prehabilitation services designed for cancer patients
- **Return-to-work programs:** Guidance on transitioning back to work, including accommodations and communication with employers
- **Long-term monitoring:** Screening for late effects of treatment (neuropathy, fatigue, secondary cancers) and coordination with your primary care provider
- **Health and wellness workshops:** Nutrition, stress management, mindfulness, yoga, and exercise classes tailored to cancer survivors

4. Online Communities

Online communities offer 24/7 peer support from the comfort of your home. Popular and reputable options include:

- **American Cancer Society (cancer.org):** Information library, online support communities, and the 24/7 helpline
- **CancerCare (cancercare.org):** Free professional support services including online support groups, counseling, and financial assistance
- **Cancer Support Community (cancersupportcommunity.org):** Online groups, educational workshops, and the Cancer Support Helpline
- **Colontown (colontown.org):** Private Facebook-based community for colorectal cancer patients and caregivers — highly active and organized by stage and topic
- **PanCAN (pancan.org):** Pancreatic Cancer Action Network — patient services, peer-to-peer support, and clinical trial finder
- **Smart Patients (smartpatients.com):** Online forums organized by cancer type — moderated for quality and accuracy

Tip: Be cautious with medical advice from unmoderated forums. Always verify information with your care team before making treatment decisions based on online discussions.

5. Family Support Tools

Cancer affects the whole family. These tools can help your loved ones stay organized and supported:

- **CaringBridge:** A free, private platform to share health updates with family and friends — reduces the burden of repeating information
- **Meal Train / Meal coordination apps:** Let your community sign up to bring meals during recovery
- **Lotsa Helping Hands:** An online care calendar where friends and family can volunteer for specific tasks (rides, errands, childcare)

- **Family meetings:** Schedule regular check-ins to discuss care responsibilities, emotional needs, and ask for help — prevents caregiver burnout
- **Children and teens:** Age-appropriate resources are available through your hospital's child life specialists or organizations like CancerCare's programs for children of cancer patients

Caregivers need care too. Encourage your family members to use these resources and to prioritize their own health and well-being.

This resource is for educational purposes only and does not replace individualized medical advice. Your care team can help connect you with the resources most appropriate for your situation.