Support Your Partner

Take steps to help meet each other's needs now.

December 14, 2020 By Kate Ferguson

A cancer diagnosis has profound effects on the person diagnosed as well as their loved ones. Intimate relationships in particular are especially challenging during this time, when people are most vulnerable to a variety of physical and emotional stressors. Although many challenges may arise, the tips below can help partners address them before precious bonds are broken.

The first challenge is to communicate openly and honestly with each other. Partners may become afraid to express how they really feel when cancer strikes a significant other. Individuals may feel helpless in the face of a disease many still regard as a killer lying in wait. The partner with cancer may feel pressure to maintain a positive attitude, while the caregiving partner may hold back expressing fears to avoid compounding stress.

Talk is therapeutic. Only through sharing our thoughts and emotions can we learn to become less fearful. Frequently, all people want is someone to listen to what they have to say, especially about how they're feeling. Conversations often don't even have to be about cancer.

Face cancer together. In a partnership where one person has cancer, the disease can act to separate individuals from each other and promote isolation. Determine together which decisions will be made jointly and which ones should be made alone.

Confront uncomfortable issues. Whatever problems, thoughts, questions and concerns each of you has, name them respectfully so your partner won't feel threatened or humiliated. Consider speaking with a professional therapist for suggestions about how to manage any problems cancer may be causing. (See Resources: Emotional Support.)

Rethink priorities. Managing any chronic illness requires reassessing future plans. Couples should focus first and foremost on the partner undergoing cancer treatment. At this time, it's important to be flexible should your plans need to change permanently. As you adjust to the challenges of a cancer diagnosis together, new opportunities may arise.

4 Ways Couples Can Get Stronger

1. Communicate openly. Don't be afraid to express your fears to each other.
2. Face cancer as a team. Determine together which decisions will be made jointly and which ones

should be made alone.

3. Confront the uncomfortable. Cancer can impair libido, mood and self-esteem. You may want to see a therapist to help you manage problems together.
4. Reprioritize. A chronic illness can affect future plans and goals. But you can find new ones to replace them.

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http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/how-to-support-partner