



# Talking Cancer with Friends & Family: *Tip Sheet*

## **How do you tell someone you have cancer?**

Short responses such as, *“Last month I found out that I have colon cancer. It’s been scary and sad for me and my family, but I have a great team of medical professionals and caregivers who are helping me.”*

Once you let someone know that you have been diagnosed, you may want to reassure that you are doing whatever it takes to fight the cancer and would like their support and encouragement.

Remember, it’s okay to cry!

🌀 **TIP:** Often, it’s easier to communicate information through a family member or website [www.caringbridge.com](http://www.caringbridge.com) - a free resource.

Appointing a spokesperson can also keep loved ones in the loop without wearing you out.

## **How do you answer the “How can I help?” question:**

Allow friends and family to help you. It helps them feel they are part of your life. And be specific.

## **TIPS for starting the conversation:**

*“I really need a ride, would you take me to my next appointment on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“Can you help with laundry/yard work/child care/housecleaning?”*

*“I’m looking for ways to get my mind off treatment. Will you be sure to invite me to do something fun? Friday nights are good for me.”*

Here’s a list of ways people can help me:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

### Questions people might have:

How long do you have to live?

Are you going to die?

What kind of treatment will you get?

Are you going to be sick?

Will you lose your hair?

Will it grow back?

Are they going to do surgery?

Will you have to quit work?

Are you coming back to work?

Who is taking care of the kids?

When will you be done with treatment?

### How can you politely interrupt someone when you don't feel like talking about your diagnosis?

*"Thank you so much for your concern, but I need to focus on something else today."* Follow-up by asking about them or their family.

*"Thank you for asking, but I'd rather not talk about it right now"*

*"You know, usually I am okay to talk about things like this, but today I just can't handle it. I'm sure you understand."*

*"I'd prefer to not go into details."*

### How to respond to inappropriate things people say:

Did you smoke?

You should/shouldn't. . .

→ *What do you mean by that?*

How did you get it?

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

→ *Does it matter?*

Someone shares a story with a bad ending.

You don't look sick!

→ *I'm trying to be positive*

☺ **TIP:** If you think someone is asking inappropriate questions but are well intentioned, you can say, *"I appreciate your concern, but I'm trying to stay away from negative conversation"*.

You can also lean on your medical team by saying, *"My doctor/nurse/medical team told me to concentrate on my treatment plan."*

### How to avoid pitfalls in communication:

When someone asks to help, try to avoid saying: *"Oh, nothing right now. We're just fine."*

Don't neglect a friend/relative who may need to talk with you. Connect with them by saying, *"How are you doing? Can you believe \_\_\_?"*

Don't set up a false front or "happy face" if you don't feel that way. Share your true feelings.

### Communication is a two-way street:

Remember that people who have never known someone with cancer may not know how to communicate with you.

Don't ignore someone you haven't heard from. Reach out to that person, and encourage them to stay in touch.

*"I'm not sure if you heard, but I have been diagnosed with cancer. I value your support. Is there a time we can get together?"*

☺ **TIP:** Remember to allow friends and family to help you. It helps them feel they are part of your life.

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**LISTEN TO THIS INFORMATION ON OUR PODCAST AT [www.triadcancerpodcast.com](http://www.triadcancerpodcast.com)**