

Helplessness and fear...

That is what you may be going through, and that is what your partner may be feeling, too. Imagine what you would think and feel if it were not you but your partner who was diagnosed with breast cancer. Would you feel helpless? Would you feel like you would want to do anything and everything you could to take away the cancer, yet at the same time, there was nothing you could do? Your partner probably feels the same way.

Cancer is a disease full of unknowns and your partner will have questions and concerns. Encourage your partner to share his or her feelings. For example you may say, "I know you are afraid. I am too. Let's talk about it." However, because you are the one with the cancer, the focus will be on you. Sometimes partners may feel that they should not ask you for help because they are supposed to be helping you.

Your partner needs to hear that you will try to understand what they are going through, especially if they talk to you. Along with the feeling of helplessness may come a fear of losing you. On the one hand, it is a wonderful thing that there is someone to whom you matter so much that the thought of losing you is painful. On the other hand, this is something that you need to allow your partner to talk about as well.

Your partner may also be referred to as a co-survivor. Co-survivors are family, friends, health care providers or colleagues — who are there to lend support from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond.

Listening to your partner, and talking will help you help each other.



We are all human...

Because of this, we need support from others. If you have trouble talking with your partner, ask someone else that you know to help. This might be your doctor or another member of your health care team, a friend or even another family member. They are more than willing to help you both.

You may be interested in support groups for couples. You can find out about these from any member of your health care team. Listening to and talking to others who have gone through or are going through breast cancer can be very helpful. You can discuss anything from the most general topics (like nutrition) to the most personal topics (like physical intimacy).

Finding support from others will not only help you — it will help them also.

About the term “partner”

What is a partner?

While the term may have a different meaning to you than it does to someone else, the generally accepted meaning is “that person to whom you are closest.” This person is usually (but not always) a non-blood relative and may be your spouse, partner in life, boyfriend, girlfriend and/or your best friend.

While it may be difficult right now to find much to be thankful for, having a partner, someone who really cares about you and loves you, is something for which to be truly thankful.

Together through it all

Think about your relationship with your partner. You have been through both happy and difficult times together. Your diagnosis may be shocking news at first. The more you and your partner find out about it, the more you will learn that today, breast cancer is a disease that can be treated successfully.

Do not be afraid to talk about your feelings. You will find that if either of you hold your thoughts, worries and fears inside, they can create a wall between you and actually cause you to grow apart. A good place to start may be a simple open-ended question such as, “What makes you feel good today and how can I help you?”

Think about all the good times you have shared. Think about the rough times. You have both made it through them all — and have stayed together. Actually, for some couples, going through something very serious — like breast cancer — brings them closer together. Your fears are shared, your joys are shared and both of you can make it through the treatment and recovery from breast cancer together.

Resources

Organizations

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® — promises to save lives and end breast cancer forever by empowering people, ensuring quality care for all and energizing science to find the cures.

1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)

www.komen.org

American Cancer Society’s Reach to Recovery program — has trained breast cancer survivors who visit newly diagnosed patients.

1-800-ACS-2345

www.cancer.org

Breast Cancer™ Network of Strength — ensures, through information, empowerment and peer support, that no one faces breast cancer alone.

1-800-221-2141 (English)

1-800-986-9505 (Spanish)

www.networkofstrength.org

National Family Caregivers Association — educates, supports, empowers and speaks up for family caregivers.

1-800-896-3650

www.nfcares.org

Men Against Breast Cancer™ — leverages the important role of the husband/partner caring for the woman he loves.

1-866-547-MABC

www.menagainstbreastcancer.org

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Getting the Support You Need
- Sexuality & Intimacy
- When the Diagnosis Is Cancer — An Overview