

Cancer Caregiver Support Groups

If you're caring for someone with cancer, you may find yourself craving support and encouragement from people with similar experiences. One option is joining a cancer caregiver support group. Countless caregivers have benefited from being an active member of a support group. Here are a few things to think about as you explore your options.

Where to Find a Caregiver Support Group

When a lot of people think of support groups, they picture dingy meeting halls, stale coffee and a circle of uncomfortable chairs. It's time to put that stereotype to rest. Cancer caregiver support groups today come in all shapes and sizes. There are even online groups you can join from the comfort of your living room sofa.

The first step to finding the right fit is exploring your options. One good place to start is the American Cancer Society's website under the Treatment & Support tab. Their "search for resources" tool allows you to plug in your ZIP code or city and search for family- and caregiver-support resources in your area. You can also ask about cancer caregiver support groups at the hospital or clinic where your loved one receives treatment.

Online options are also available. Check out websites for your loved one's particular type of cancer (e.g., nationalbreastcancer.org). If an online support group option interests you, cancer.org also offers free, 15-week online groups that are led by an oncology social worker.



CANCER CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

What to Look For

Generally speaking, if you feel comfortable while attending a support group meeting and walk away feeling empowered, you've found a good group. You might also consider the following:

- ✓ Check the group's **confidentiality policy**. Support groups should be safe spaces where you can share your thoughts without fear that they will be repeated outside of the group. A support group that values trust will mention its confidentiality policy frequently.
- ✓ Make sure the **leadership** is to your liking. Some groups are led by a current or former caregiver — someone who has been in your shoes. Some groups are led by a licensed social worker or other professional. Both have merit, but you may find yourself preferring one over the other.
- ✓ Think about the **members of the group**. Do you feel at ease in their presence? Are members respected when they share their thoughts and feelings?
- ✓ Do you like the **group structure**? For example, are walk-ins welcome, or is the group the same people for a certain duration of time — and which appeals to you more? Are there educational opportunities, such as guest speakers?
- ✓ Do the group's **meeting time and place** work with your schedule? Is the group leader mindful about starting and ending meetings on time?

What to Expect

As with any new experience, your first time at a caregivers' support group may feel a bit intimidating. Take it at your own pace. You may not be ready to share your thoughts, fears, ideas or frustrations at your first meeting — or even your fifth meeting. That's okay! A lot of people choose to simply listen for a few weeks before they're ready to join in. Over time, you'll probably find that when you add to the group's conversation, it not only benefits you, but also helps the people around you.

CANCER CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

Is It the Right Fit?

The Mayo Clinic lists the following as benefits of participating in a support group. If the group you choose helps you check several of these boxes, it's probably a good option for you!

- ✓ Feeling less lonely or isolated
- ✓ Reducing distress
- ✓ Talking openly and honestly about your feelings
- ✓ Improving coping skills
- ✓ Staying motivated
- ✓ Gaining a sense of empowerment, control or hope
- ✓ Improving your understanding of your loved one's disease
- ✓ Getting practical feedback
- ✓ Learning about resources

It can take a while for the benefits of a support group to kick in. If you're unhappy with one group, don't be afraid to try another. There is help for cancer caregivers who want to manage stress and talk about their experiences with others. Search for the right group until you find one that gives you the encouragement you so richly deserve.

Sources:

National Cancer Institute: Cancer Support Groups

<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/adjusting-to-cancer/support-groups>

Mayo Clinic: Support Groups

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/support-groups/art-20044655>

Caregiver Support Groups

https://www.cancercare.org/support_groups/77-caregiver_support_group_spouses_partners

Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare. This article is for your information and convenience only and does not replace the care or advice of a doctor. Always talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program, therapy, or medication. The health information provided in this guide is general in nature and is not medical advice or a substitute for professional health care. UnitedHealthcare does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information, and does not recommend or endorse the products which are referenced in the guide.

©2020 United HealthCare Services, Inc.

Y0066_SPRJ55102_C