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**BE A FRIEND TO A
CANCER SURVIVOR**



SHOPRITE 

Be a friend to a cancer survivor

When people hear the words "you have cancer" they experience a wide range of feelings: shock, denial, anger, fear, sadness and eventually acceptance. They enter a world of bewildering choices about treatment, pain management, health maintenance, financial burdens, changing personal relationships, body image, life expectancy and questions like "what if?", "now what?" and "why me?". They may even find that cancer is not the most serious problem they have to face.

Living with cancer is a challenge. No two cancers are alike, just as no two cancer patients are alike. Each circumstance is unique and comes with its own set of problems to be solved. Many cancers can be controlled and many new treatments are being developed. Cancer is not a death sentence; however it may require unfamiliar lifestyle changes.

At the time of diagnosis, a cancer survivor has every reason to believe that he or she will respond well to treatment and be cured. Such belief offers the best foundation for being hopeful that tomorrow will bring better times.

Research has shown that, in addition to early detection, treatment and care, a positive outlook and support from family and friends play an important role in a cancer survivor's recovery.

How can you be a friend to a cancer survivor?

Practical help is often valuable to a friend going through cancer treatment. Remember that needs change frequently because of time commitments for treatment, symptoms and side effects, energy level, and ability to concentrate. Be creative with the help you offer, and be flexible in changing plans as needed.

It can also mean helping your friend cope with feelings, like when he or she feels sad or angry. Sometimes having someone to talk to is what your friend needs most. If your friend has a primary caregiver, you can help out a lot by relieving some of his or her duties. Many people who were once caregivers say they did too much on their own. Some wished that they had asked for help sooner.

Here are some suggestions:

- Give your friend space, but offer to visit when he or she would like
- Make flexible plans that can be easily changed, in case something comes up or your friend needs to cancel
- Make plans for the future — this gives your friend something to look forward to
- When you make a commitment to help, follow through. For example, if you offer to bring a meal over on Sunday, do not forget
- Shop for groceries and pick up prescriptions
- Help with chores around the house, such as getting the mail, taking care of pets, cleaning, doing laundry, taking care of plants and flowers and taking out the garbage
- Baby-sit children, take them to and from school and evening activities, and arrange for play dates
- Give your friend a ride to an appointment/support group or take notes during a doctor's appointment (sometimes people have trouble with medical visits — they don't understand what the doctor says because it can be difficult to deal with their emotions and take in complex medical information, or they forget the questions they wanted to ask). You can also keep your friend company during a treatment session by sitting with him or her during a chemotherapy session
- Take a scenic drive with your friend when he/she is too weak to take a stroll in the park
- Be humorous and fun when appropriate and when needed
- Allow for sadness — do not ignore uncomfortable topics or feelings

- Make time for a weekly check-in phone call. Let your friend know when you will be calling, but let him or her know that it is okay to not answer the phone
- Try not to let your friend's condition get in the way of your friendship. Treat him or her the same way you always have
- Ask about interests, hobbies, and other topics not related to cancer — people going through treatment sometimes need a break from talking about cancer
- If you aren't sure how to help, ask



What to say - simple guidelines to use when talking with your friend

Avoid saying:

- I know just how you feel
- You need to talk
- I know just what you should do
- I feel helpless
- I don't know how you manage
- I'm sure you'll be fine

- Don't worry
- How much time do the doctors give you?
- Let me know what I can do (instead, offer specific ways in which you can help and things you can provide, should they need to call on you)

Do say:

- I'm sorry this has happened to you
- If you ever feel like talking, I am here to listen
- What are you thinking of doing, and how can I help?
- I care about you

CANSA offers HOPE and support to you, your loved ones, and your community in the fight against cancer. Funds raised with **Cuppa For CANSA** will be used for our cancer prevention and education programmes, patient care and support in the form of Interim Homes in the main metropolitan areas for out-of-town cancer patients, support centres that offer stoma and lymphoedema clinics, medical equipment hire, toll-free line and support to individuals, children and families affected by cancer.



For more information on how to make your Cuppa memorable and fun, contact your nearest CANSA office or call CANSA toll free on **0800 22 66 22** or email **info@cansa.org.za** or see the website **www.cansa.org.za**

Share your story of HOPE or Cuppa event (and photos) with us and send to info@cansa.org.za and we'll share it with fellow cancer survivors to help strengthen their hope.

Should you have any comments on our range of consumer leaflets, please write to Sarita van Wyk at:
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