

44 Ways to Make the Day of Someone with Cancer

By [Elana Miller, MD](#)

Cancer patients and new survivors could benefit from a community of supporters — family, coworkers, friends — who step up and take care of them when needed most.

When a person first gets a cancer diagnosis, they're often so overwhelmed they have no idea how to ask for help or what to ask for — but they sure need it. If you have a friend or family member with cancer you want to help, don't make the mistake of making a vague, questionably-sincere offer "Well, call me when you need me!" (they won't).

Instead, make your friend or loved one's life easier by anticipating his or her needs and giving tangible, much-needed support. Here is a list of the top favors to make their day better and life much easier after their cancer diagnosis.

- 1. Deliver a meal.** Make sure to ask in advance if they have any dietary restrictions or are following any guidelines. Stay for a visit, or just drop off the food if they're not up for it (a cooler left outside the front door is perfect for this).
- 2. Deliver a Tupperware of several pre-made meals your friend can heat up as needed.** Use Tupperware you don't need returned.
- 3. Send a quick email, text, or message saying you're thinking of them.**
- 4. Add "No need to respond" to the end of your message — they'll appreciate hearing from you without feeling the need to do anything in return.**
- 5. Add "Feel free to take me up on this offer whenever" when you offer help — they'll know the offer will still be sincere whenever they need it (in a week, a month, a year).**
- 6. Set a calendar alert reminding you to check in with a quick hello or offer of help on a regular basis.**
- 7. Send a text the next time you're at the grocery store and ask if they'd like you to pick anything up.**
- 8. Send a text the next time you're at the drugstore to see if they need any toiletries.**
- 9. Send a housekeeper to clean up their place. Take care of the details so they just need to be there to open the door.**

10. Send a text the next time you're at the pharmacy to see if they need any prescriptions picked up.
11. Send a mobile masseuse for a gift massage.
12. Offer to take them out for a coffee or lunch date.
13. Offer to visit. Check that they're feeling up for it.
14. **Offer to take them out to a movie. If they're too tired, come by with a rental.**
15. Offer a ride to chemo and keep them company during the treatment. Even better, commit to giving a ride on a regular basis throughout their treatments.
16. **Let them know you're "on call" for emergencies. Mean it.**
17. Send a flower delivery. However, make sure the person isn't on neutropenic precautions first; fresh flowers can be an infection risk for cancer patients with weakened immune systems. Sadly, I had to give away the many wonderful flower deliveries I got right after my diagnosis. Or, consider silk flowers (no worries about causing infection, and they last longer).
18. Order take-out and have it delivered. Ask if they have a favorite restaurant. If they seem too overwhelmed to make any decisions, just get a sense of their dietary preferences and pick out a nice meal to send.
19. Gift a magazine or newspaper subscription.
20. Gift a good book.
21. **Tell them you love and care about them.** Even if they don't have the energy to respond, your message means a lot.
22. For your lady cancer friend, take her out to a nice beauty treatment. Think: manicure/pedicure, facial, makeup application, etc. It may be the first time she's splurged on her appearance in a while.
23. **Send a card. Make sure it's legible — cancer eyes are tired eyes :-)**
24. Gift an Uber or Lyft gift certificate if you're not available to offer a ride.
25. If you're a close friend or family member to the cancer patient, offer to be a "point person" where you screen and accept/decline others' visit and help offers. Right after a diagnosis there are many who want to help and visit and call, but the person with cancer is probably extremely overwhelmed at this time and may prefer some space.

- 26.** Understand that a cancer patient is likely too overwhelmed to ask what they need; take the initiative by offering specifics, instead of saying, “Let me know if there’s anything I can do for you.”
- 27.** Remember to still be there a few months after the diagnosis, when it’s not so new anymore. The fanfare will have died down, but your friend will still be struggling and needing logistical and emotional help.
- 28.** Offer to be the “communication person” that updates others about your friend’s state of health; it can get difficult to have to share the details over and over.
- 29.** On that note, when you check in, **don’t always ask for all the details about the current state of your friend’s health.**
- 30.** Does your friend have a dog? Offer to come by and take them for a walk or to the groomers.
- 31.** Does your friend have kids? Offer to babysit, do a school pick-up, or have them over for a sleepover.
- 32. Say, “Give me a task.”** Maybe it will be laundry, or an errand, or picking up groceries. Be in and out. No socializing needed.
- 33.** Does your friend have a garden? Offer to come by and do some watering and care. Even better, commit to taking over the watering regularly.
- 34. Text or email a silly joke or photo.**
- 35.** Offer to help your friend sift through and respond to emails; after a cancer diagnosis the number of emails can be overwhelming and important ones can get lost in the shuffle.
- 36.** Offer to create and manage a schedule for the person: for meal deliveries, rides to chemo, visits from friends, etc. Websites like takethemameal.com and lotsahelpinghands.com can help.
- 37.** If you can, and your friend feels comfortable accepting it, give some cash — between hospital bills and the loss of income if one can’t work, cancer can be a huge financial hit.
- 38.** Donate money to cover paid-time-off hours for the patient or close family members (some employers allow this).
- 39. Buy a monthly parking pass for family members when the patient has a prolonged hospitalization — hospital parking gets expensive!**

40. Gift a hat, wig, or scarf if your friend will lose her hair with treatment.
41. Gift a super comfy blanket. This was one of my favorite and most-used gifts (good for couch lounging or trips to chemo).
42. **Just listen.** Don't give advice, don't try to be cheery — just listen and let your buddy talk.
43. Ask what they need from you most right now... and then do it.
44. **Cancer is not contagious — give your friend a hug, hold their hand to let them know you are on their side.**

Elana Miller, MD is a psychiatrist passionate about integrating Eastern Wisdom with Western medicine to help people live happier and fuller lives. She writes at her blog [Zen Psychiatry](#). To hear more about her cancer journey and get more tips for how to deal with a cancer diagnosis, [download her free Cancer Quick-Start Guide here](#).