Article Series Talking About Cancer

How to Ask for Help — and Accept It

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All Talking About Cancer

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For some people living with cancer, asking for help can be a hard thing to do.

If you're one of them, that's ok. Everyone's cancer journey is different, and everyone has different feelings about asking for help.

Your comfort with asking for help may be shaped by practical things, like your friends and family and who you have in your support network. It may also be shaped by deeper, more emotional factors. For example, if your independence is important to you or you are someone who usually takes care of others, asking for help might

not come naturally.

The thing to know is that whoever you are, whatever your circumstances, it’s okay to ask for help. Here are some small, easy actions called **Microsteps** you can consider taking to make it easier to ask for — and accept — help. As always, consult with your care team if you have any questions or concerns about asking for help from others.

Teaching your family and friends about your cancer.

People who are not living with cancer may find it difficult to know exactly what you’re going through. But you can let them know how it affects your life and how they can support you. Try to be patient with them as they learn, and keep in mind that each person might respond differently.

Planning regular check-ins with someone in your support network.

This can create time to tell them how you’re feeling and ask for specific help you need, without you having to reach out each time you need something. Consider a Sunday phone call where you can look ahead to what you’ll need for the week, or a Monday morning coffee.

Asking someone else how they ask for help.

If you’re connected with someone else who is also living with cancer, consider asking how they choose to ask for help. They may have ideas or recommendations based on their experience that you can learn from.

Setting and sharing your boundaries.

Knowing when to do things yourself and when to ask for help can be challenging. Consider letting people know when you prefer to handle things yourself and when you would appreciate their help. For example:

- “I prefer to manage my medication schedule myself, but I’d appreciate it if you could help me with meal preparation.”
- “I like to handle my personal routines alone, but I could use help with the laundry and cleaning the house.”

- “I’m comfortable driving to my local appointments, but I’d feel better having company on longer trips I need to make.”

Giving yourself some grace.

Accepting help may be difficult. You may find meaning in telling yourself that you deserve help. Positive thoughts and comments to yourself like “I would do the same for the people I love most” and “I deserve to be taken care of” may help offset negative feelings and help you accept the fact that everyone living with cancer needs help.

Saying thank you to your helpers.

Sharing thanks can go a long way. It shows you are grateful for the help you’ve been given – no matter how big or small – and can encourage continued support. You might choose a verbal thank you, simple text message, or phone call to let them know their help makes a difference. Check out another resource on the topic called ‘Making space for gratitude’

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