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Navigating the hospital visit

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All Preparing for Appointments

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It may feel intimidating to visit someone in the hospital. But for those living with cancer, the support of family and friends can help lift their spirits.

If you're planning to visit someone in the hospital, read on for tips to ensure a smooth visit.

Plan Ahead

No matter how close the friend or family member, it's important to plan your visit in advance. Hospital stays involve many medical professionals coming in and out of the room, as well as certain times for eating, bathing and more. Before visiting, you'll want to make sure you pick a time that won't interrupt any medical priorities. You also want to coordinate so as not to overwhelm your loved one with too many visitors at once. Reach out to a spouse or partner, adult children or whoever else may be helping to oversee care and determine a good time to visit. Make sure to also confirm the day of, and check that your loved one is still feeling up to a visit.

Don't Stay Too Long

During a hospital stay, focusing on getting better is paramount. Supportive visits are definitely a part of that, but remember that a hospital stay can be tiring. It's okay to stop in for a short time—even just 10 or 15 minutes. Use your best judgment and assess your loved one's energy level before deciding to stay longer.

Keep It Positive

Doctors and other medical professionals are the best people to keep hospital patients updated on their condition. So, leave the medical talk to them—unless your loved one volunteers those details to you. As a visitor, remember your role is to provide some cheer in their day—or just sit quietly while they rest. It can be helpful to plan a few things to share in advance—a funny story about your child, or the plot of a book you brought as a gift, for example. Now is not the time to ask invasive questions or complain about anything in your own life. Focus on communicating to your friend or family member that you love them and are thinking about them, even when you're not there. Need some more ideas? Here are some tips on what to say to someone living with cancer.

Bring a Gift

It's always nice to bring something when you're visiting someone in the hospital. But remember that hospitals often have rules about what you can and can't gift. Check the hospital's website in advance and keep in mind that those living with cancer may have special diets and/or be sensitive to smells. It's best to steer clear of fruits, vegetables or any other non-packaged food, as well as fragrant flowers or lotions. Books, magazines, a small stuffed animal to cheer up the room or a heartfelt card are usually winners. You can also ask ahead of time to see what your loved one might need or want.

Care Takes Precedence

Your visit is a great way to support your friend or family member, but remember to let medical care take precedence. If you arrive and the door is closed, knock first. If a doctor or other medical professional stops by, step out of the room unless asked to stay. And if you are feeling under the weather the day of your visit, call and reschedule. Making sure your loved one receives the best care with the privacy they deserve is the priority.

By planning ahead and following some basic guidelines, you can help lift the spirits of someone living with cancer during a hospital stay. If you have other tips to share, tag @ThisisLivingwithCancer and #InspirationLives on social media.