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## Cancer Support Groups

Cancer support groups are meetings for people with cancer and anyone touched by the disease. They can have many benefits. Even though a lot of people receive support from friends and family, people join a support group to be with others who have the same type of cancer or similar cancer experiences. Some research shows that joining a support group improves both quality of life and survival.

Cancer support groups can

- help you feel better, more hopeful, and not so alone.
- give you a chance to talk about your feelings and work through them.
- help you deal with practical problems, such as problems at work or school.
- help you cope with side effects of treatment.

**Support groups vary in focus.** Some groups focus on all kinds of cancer. Others talk about just one kind, such as a group for women with breast cancer or one for men with prostate cancer. Some can be open to everyone or just for people of a certain age, sex, culture, or religion. For instance, some groups are just for teens or young children.

**Cancer support groups can also be helpful for children or family members.** These groups focus on family concerns such as role changes, relationship changes, financial worries, and how to support the person with cancer. Some groups include both cancer survivors and family members.

### **Types of Cancer Support Groups**

**In-person support groups** often take place at a hospital, community center, school, or other convenient place where people can gather. Depending on the group, some you may need to sign up for, while others you can come whenever you'd like.

**Online cancer support groups** are "meetings" that take place online. People meet through chat rooms, listservs, webinars, social media (such as Twitter or Facebook),

or moderated discussion groups. People often like online support groups because they can take part in them any time of the day or night. They're also good for people who can't travel to meetings or live in rural areas.

Before joining, check the privacy settings and how information is used on the site. Note that some online support groups are sponsored by cancer organizations, while others aren't monitored. Therefore, always check with your doctor about any cancer information you receive from the group to make sure it's correct.

**Telephone support groups** are when everyone dials in to a phone line that is linked together, like a conference call. They can share and talk to others with similar experiences from all over the country. There is usually little or no charge.

### **Where to Find a Cancer Support Group**

Many hospitals, cancer centers, community groups, and schools offer cancer support groups. Below are some ways to find groups near you.

- Ask your health care team if your cancer center or hospital has cancer support groups.
- Ask your hospital social worker where to find support groups.
- Talk to other patients who have tried support groups.
- Look for advocacy groups or organizations for your specific cancer type. Many offer groups and listservs for your needs.
- Do an online search for groups in your area. Or go to the NCI database [Organizations that Offer Cancer Support Services](#) to find those that offer support groups. Examples include [CancerCare](#) and the [Cancer Support Community](#).

### **Is a Cancer Support Group Right for Me?**

Before joining a support group, you may want to ask yourself if you're comfortable talking about personal issues with others. You can also think about what you hope to gain by joining one. A support group may not be right for everyone. Some people don't like to hear about others' problems. And some find that their need for a support group changes over time.

If you have a choice of support groups, visit a few and see what they're like. See which ones make sense for you. Although many groups are free, some charge a

small fee. Find out if your health insurance pays for support groups.

If you're thinking about joining a cancer support group, here are some questions you may want to ask the group's contact person:

- How large is the group?
- Who attends (survivors, family members, types of cancer, age range)?
- How long are the meetings?
- How often does the group meet?
- Who leads the meetings - a professional or a survivor?
- Is the main purpose to share feelings, or do people also offer tips to solve common problems?
- If I go, can I just sit and listen?
- If online, do I have to turn my camera on?

Support groups vary greatly, and if you have one bad experience, it doesn't mean these groups aren't a good option for you. You may also want to find another cancer survivor with whom you can discuss your cancer experience. Many organizations have peer support programs. They can pair you with someone who has your type of cancer and is close to your age and background.

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