Talking With Your Friends

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [1], August / 2012

Key Messages:

- Cancer may affect your relationships with your friends. Some relationships may grow stronger, and others may fade.
- During your cancer experience, you may make new friends as you encounter new opportunities and meet others facing the same challenge.
- Tell your friends about your cancer, how you are feeling, what activities you can still participate in, and how they can help you to make communication easier.

How your friends may act

Often, young adults may have little or no experience with a life-threatening illness such as cancer and may not know how to act around you. A cancer diagnosis may also frighten some of your friends because it is a reminder that cancer can happen to anyone, even a young adult.

- If your friends are avoiding you, they may notknow what to say [2] and may worry about saying the wrong thing.
- If they avoid mentioning your cancer, they may be afraid of upsetting you.
- If they aren't calling you, it may be because they think you won't feel like talking.
- If they aren't inviting you to be a part of activities, they may think you won't be able to go or they may feel guilty about having fun when you're sick.
- If they aren't visiting you, they may think you don't want visitors or worry about any potentially awkward moments during the visit.

Don't be afraid to take the lead and call your friends or invite them over. Plan activities that you feel comfortable doing so your friends can get a better understanding of what you?re able to do with them.

Talking with your friends

It may be necessary for you to put your friends at ease and talk about your cancer diagnosis. Because your friends probably don't know much about cancer, you can help by explaining your cancer and treatment. Start by deciding what you want your friends to know. You may consider sharing more information with close friends and less information with acquaintances. Remember that you are in charge of what you tell people, so you don't have to tell anyone until you're ready, and you don't have to say more than you want to.

Accepting help from your friends

Your friends will want to help you, but they may not know how. Be honest about what you need and what your friends can do to help.

- Let friends know that they can speak openly and directly with you about your cancer experience.
- Ask them to keep calling you, even if you don't always feel like talking.
- If you can't see your friends, ask them to keep in touch through texting, instant messaging, e-mail, letters, or phone calls.
- Tell your friends that sometimes all you need is for them to listen.
- Remind friends that even though you may look different on the outside, you're still the same on the inside.
- Ask them to keep inviting you to things. Even if you can't always go, you'll go when you can.
- If you can't go out, ask some friends over to watch a movie or just hang out together.
- Ask friends to help you in specific ways, such as with meal preparation, errands, transportation, shopping, or hospital visits.
- Ask a close friend to accompany you to doctors' visits and chemotherapy treatments.
- Encourage your friends to share their feelings with you.

Accepting changes

Your friendships are likely to change, but many changes will be positive. You may be closer to some of your friends and find it easier to talk about important things. You may also find that the experience of cancer changes you somewhat?you may have a different perspective on life, and you may make new friends whose interests are more like yours.

Despite your efforts, some friendships will fade. It may be difficult for some people to understand your experiences with cancer. It?s important to focus on friends who are able to support and listen to you. Talking with other young adults who share your experiences can be extremely helpful. Consider joining asupport group [3] for young adults with cancer.

More Information

Sharing Your Story [4]

Supporting a Friend Who Has Cancer [5]

Finding a Support Buddy [6]

Online Communities for Support [7]

Cancer in Young Adults [8]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/25310
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/25383
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24672
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24691
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24526
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/24634
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/25117