

## **Support Groups [1]**

**This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 03/2016**

Having cancer is often one of the most stressful experiences in a person's life. However, support groups help many people cope with the emotional aspects of cancer by providing a safe place to share their feelings and challenges. They also allow people to learn from others facing similar situations.

### **Reasons to join a support group**

Receiving a cancer diagnosis often triggers a strong emotional response. Some people experience shock, anger, and disbelief. Others may feel intense sadness, fear, and a sense of loss. Sometimes even the most supportive family members and friends cannot understand exactly how it feels to have cancer. This can lead to loneliness and isolation.

Support groups allow people to talk about their experiences with others living with cancer, which can help reduce stress. Group members can share feelings and experiences that may seem too strange or too difficult to share with family and friends. And the group dynamics often create a sense of belonging that helps each person feel more understood and less alone.

Support group members may also discuss practical information. This may include what to expect during treatment, how to manage pain and other side effects of treatment, and how to communicate with health care providers and family members. Exchanging information and advice may provide a sense of control and reduce feelings of helplessness.

Many studies have shown that support groups help people with cancer feel less depressed and anxious. Support groups also help them feel more hopeful and enable them to manage their emotions better. However, support groups are not the right fit for everyone. Some people may benefit from other sources of support.

## Types of support groups

Groups offer support through a variety of ways. Each person should find the group that works best for his or her needs. The following are different types of support groups:

- Peer-led or self-help groups are facilitated by group members.
- In a professional-led group, a trained counselor, social worker, or psychologist may facilitate the conversation among the members.
- Informational support groups—led by a professional facilitator—provide cancer-related information and education. These groups often invite speakers, such as doctors, who provide expert advice.

Groups may also be designed for specific audiences, including:

- All individuals with cancer
- People with one type of cancer, such as breast cancer or prostate cancer
- People of a certain age group
- People who have a specific stage of cancer
- Caregivers, such as family members and friends

In recent years, Internet support groups have become popular. These groups may be a good option for people who live in remote areas, who don't have easy access to transportation, or who don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences in person. Internet support groups also allow people with rare types of cancer to communicate with others who have the same type of cancer.

Internet support groups allow people to communicate in a variety of ways:

- Newsgroups and electronic mailing lists send messages written by group members to the entire group.

- Discussion groups, message boards, or bulletin boards allow people to post a message, and others can reply to it.
- Chat rooms allow members to communicate with each other in real time by typing messages back and forth.

Read more about some [online communities for support](#) [3].

## **How to choose a type of support group**

To decide which type of support group may fit you best, consider your needs and personality:

- Do you need emotional support, information and education, or a combination of both?
- Do you prefer sharing your experiences with a group in person? Or, do you prefer an anonymous environment, such as an Internet support group?

You may not be interested in joining a support group or find that support groups are not helpful for you. If so, consider these other sources of support:

- Talk with a friend.
- Get individual [counseling](#) [4].
- Ask a doctor or nurse specific questions.
- Participate in activities that you enjoy and that allow you to connect with friends or family.

## **How to find a support group**

- Check with your doctor, nurse, or the hospital or medical center where you are receiving treatment. Many hospitals and cancer treatment centers sponsor support groups for their patients. A [social worker](#) [5] at the hospital may also help you find a community support group.

- Search a list of [groups classified by specific disease types](#) [6].
- Search a list of [organizations that offer support and services for people with any type of cancer](#) [7].
- Use the Internet to search for information on support groups and cancer organizations.
- Check the health section of the local newspaper for support group listings.
- Ask other patients for suggestions.

## More Information

[Finding Support and Information](#) [8]

## Additional Resources

CancerCare: [Support Groups](#) [9]

National Cancer Institute: [Organizations That Offer Support Services](#) [10]

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### Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/25383>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/51>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30961>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/finding-support-and-information/cancer-specific-resources>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/finding-support-and-information/general-cancer-groups>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30666>

[9] [http://www.cancercare.org/support\\_groups](http://www.cancercare.org/support_groups)

[10] <http://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx?js=1>