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Cancer and Your Siblings [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 10/2012

Key Messages:

- A sibling may experience a wide variety of emotions when a brother or sister is diagnosed with cancer.
- Talking openly with your brothers and sisters about your thoughts and feelings often helps bring everyone closer.?
- Your brothers and sisters can provide you with practical help and encouragement.

Siblings? reactions

Like other family members, your brothers and sisters will be affected by your cancer diagnosis. Their reactions may include the following common emotions:

- Fear and anxiety about your health and about the future
- Sadness and grief about your health and about how life is different now
- Anger about the situation and about how it changes family dynamics
- Loneliness because you or other family members spend less time with them
- Jealousy and resentment about the amount of attention that is focused you at this time
- Guilt about past conflicts between you or about feelings of anger and jealousy they experience

Your siblings? responses to cancer will depend on the closeness of your relationship; their ages, maturity levels, and personalities;?the distances they live from you; their coping styles in crisis; and the amount of support you have from others, such as a spouse or partner and close friends.

Younger brothers and sisters who are children or teenagers likely will react differently than older siblings. They may know very little about cancer, and they will be affected by changes in family dynamics more than older siblings. If your parents spend a lot of time helping you, your younger siblings who still live at home may feel ignored, left out, or resentful. And like you, they may miss familiar routines.

Try to avoid blaming yourself for any problems your brothers and sisters have coping. And if they seem overwhelmed, encourage them to seek counseling [3], which can help them learn healthy

ways to respond to their emotions.

Talking with your brothers and sisters

Talking with your siblings about your cancer diagnosis can help you support each other. In fact, sharing the cancer experience with your brothers and sisters often strengthens the relationships. However, you or your siblings may not know what to say, or they even fear talking with you about cancer [4], so you may need to guide the conversation. Help them understand the diagnosis and treatment plan. And talk openly and honestly about your thoughts, feelings, and fears, encouraging them to do the same.

A brother or sister who is close in age to you will more easily relate to the stresses, fears, and concerns that you experience as a young adult with cancer. A younger sibling, on the other hand, may not be able to understand the situation as fully, and you will need to share age-appropriate information with them.

How your brothers and sisters can help

Regardless of their ages, your brothers and sisters often want to help, and they can play an important role in supporting you. Here are some practical ways they can help:

- Keep you company on trips to the hospital or clinic?
- Spend time doing fun things with you?things that take your mind of cancer
- Visit you at home when you don't feel well enough to go out?
- Talk, reminisce, and laugh about things other than cancer?
- Help you with cooking, laundry, grocery shopping [5], and other household tasks?
- Communicate news about your treatment and recovery with other family members?

More Information

Siblings and Cancer [6]

Moving Forward Videos: Family and Friends [7] for Young Adults With Cancer

Relationships and Cancer [8]

Cancer in Young Adults [9]

Additional Resources

National Cancer Institute: When Your Brother or Sister Has Cancer [10]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/young-adults/family-friends-and-relationships/cancer-and-your-siblings
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24699
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25302
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24550

[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/25301
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/28331
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/25112
[9] http://www.cancer.net/node/25117
[10] http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/when-your-sibling-has-cancer