

CAREGIVERS NEED LOVE TOO

1. Caring Without Burning Out

Caring for someone with breast cancer is an act of deep love—and it is also hard. You may feel grateful to help and still feel tired, afraid, or overwhelmed. This guide is for you.

It's Okay to Have Feelings Too

You might feel:

- Worried about the person you love
- Stressed by schedules, bills, and responsibilities
- Guilty when you need a break
- Angry at the situation or at how life has changed

These feelings do not mean you love them any less. They mean you are human.

Try saying to yourself:

- “This is hard, and I’m doing my best.”
- “My needs matter too.”

Small Ways to Care for Yourself

Even tiny steps can help refill your tank:

- **Sleep when you can.** Rest is not selfish; it keeps you steady.
- **Eat something simple.** A sandwich, fruit, or soup is better than skipping meals.
- **Step outside for a few minutes.** Fresh air, even for 5 minutes, can reset your mind.
- **Talk to someone you trust.** Share honestly with a friend, counselor, or faith leader.

Set Kind, Clear Boundaries

Boundaries are not walls; they are healthy limits.

You can say:

- “I want to help, but I can’t do everything. Let’s make a list and see what I can realistically handle.”
- “I need to rest now so I can keep showing up for you.”
- “Can we ask others to help with meals/errands/childcare?”

When you take care of yourself, you can care for your loved one from a fuller place—not from empty.

2. What to Say (and Not Say) to Someone in Treatment

Words can be a soft landing or an added weight. You don't have to say the "perfect" thing, but a few gentle guidelines can help.

Helpful Things to Say

- "I'm so glad you told me what's going on."
- "This is really hard, and I'm here with you."
- "You don't have to be strong with me. You can just be you."
- "How are you feeling today—really?"
- "Would you like to talk, sit in silence, or be distracted for a bit?"

Short, honest messages can also mean a lot:

- "Thinking of you today."
- "Praying for you this morning."
- "You are not alone in this."

Phrases to Be Careful With

Even when meant with love, some phrases can hurt.

Consider avoiding:

- "At least they caught it early."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "You're so strong; you've got this." (can feel like pressure)
- "I know exactly how you feel." (each journey is unique)
- "You should try this diet / supplement / cure I saw online."

Instead, try:

- "I don't always know what to say, but I care so much about you."
- "Can you help me understand what this feels like for you?"

Listening Matters More Than Fixing

You don't have to fix their pain. Often what they need most is:

- Someone to listen without rushing to give advice
- Someone to sit with them in silence
- Someone who can hold their honest feelings without judgment

You can always say:

- “Thank you for trusting me with this. I’m here.”
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3. Practical Ways to Help Beyond “Let Me Know If You Need Anything”

Many people say, “Let me know if you need anything,” but when someone is exhausted or overwhelmed, it’s hard for them to ask. Specific offers can make a big difference.

Offer Something Concrete

Try saying:

- “Can I bring dinner on Tuesday or Thursday? You pick.”
- “I’m going to the store—text me your list and I’ll drop groceries at your door.”
- “I’m free Saturday morning. Can I help with laundry, dishes, or cleaning?”
- “I can drive you to treatment on [date]; would that help?”

Helpful Ideas

- **Meals:**
 - Cook or order a meal (ask about allergies/tastes).
 - Organize a meal train with friends, family, or church.
- **Rides & Appointments:**
 - Offer rides to and from treatment or doctor visits.
 - Sit with them during long appointments if they want company.
- **Household Support:**
 - Laundry, dishes, trash, light cleaning.
 - Yardwork or simple home tasks.
- **Child or Pet Care:**
 - Watch children for a few hours.
 - Help with school pickups or homework.
 - Walk the dog or help with pet appointments.
- **Emotional & Spiritual Support:**
 - Send a weekly check-in text or card.
 - Ask if they’d like you to pray with/for them.

- Share an encouraging verse or quote (only if that fits their faith and comfort).

Keep Showing Up Gently

Support is a marathon, not a sprint. Instead of one big gesture, small consistent care can mean even more:

- “I’ll text you every Monday to check in. No pressure to respond quickly.”
- “Can I put a reminder on my calendar to bring you a meal once a month for the next few months?”

Remember: you are not their savior. You are a companion. Small acts of love, given steadily, are powerful.