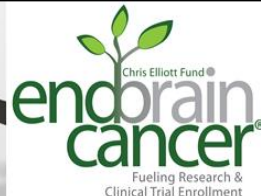


My Social Support Network



“I get by with a little help from my friends.” - The Beatles

Most things in life are much easier when you don't have to go through it alone. This is particularly true when faced with a cancer diagnosis. Having a support network can be very important, often it can significantly affect outcomes, including long term survival. One recent study* showed that lung cancer patients with strong social relationships and support systems had a 50% increased likelihood of survival compared to those who lacked these basic social ties.

How can I make sure that I have the right people around me?

Not all the people you know will be there to support you throughout your journey. Some have trouble dealing with the curveballs life throws at us and others are just not helpful. Others can be there on a very limited basis only. Some will disappear, and this may include people you have been close to for many years. At a time when you need your support network the most, for some people this “disappearing act” might feel like a betrayal. If this happens, try not to worry or give too much thought to this. Perhaps they don't know what to say, or are concerned that they may say the wrong thing, so they drop out of your life for a little while. Your responsibility is to focus on you and your care. That care includes a strong support network comprised of the people have the ability as well as the capacity to be there for you at this critical time when the focus needs to be on YOU.

One way to ensure you have a strong network is to *ask* people to help and even spend time with you. Here are some things you might consider:

- How would I describe my current support network?
- Who are those near and dear to me?
- What are my needs for having people around me? These may differ between people who prefer a crowd and others preferring more alone time.
- What are my needs besides companionship?
- Who can be included in my support network?
- I have no family or they have vanished—who can I count on?

It is important to know what's important to you in a support network. It is also important to personally reach out for help, or have someone whom you trust do this for you.

A support network does not simply mean just having someone there - it can be this, but more often it goes a lot further. Your network may offer assistance in many ways which could take things off your “daily load.”

Identifying Your Support Network

- A support network includes the all of the people in your life, outside of your medical provider and integrated support team, who are there to support you and to help you during your diagnosis and treatment. This support can follow you through your care and after treatment is over, through recovery and survivorship.
- Your support network may include:
 - *Spouse or partner*
 - *Relatives*
 - *Friends*
 - *Work colleagues*
 - *Religious ties*
 - *Social ties*
 - *Community ties*
- In one study regarding the importance of support networks it was discovered that when family members were less supportive (or less able to be supportive), community and religious ties become much more critical
- There are some people who you may not want to spend time with. That is normal. You can tell them that you are “too unwell” to listen to the problems of those who might want to spend time with you, as opposed to really helping or supporting you. Don’t be afraid to say no to some people.

You may also consider visiting the following websites:

- Meal Train - when a friend is in need, everyone says: “what can I do to help out?” The answer is usually to help them with a meal. This is what a meal train is. A community coming together to support someone. www.mealtrain.org
- Caring Bridge - an online space where you can connect, share news, and receive support. It’s your very own health social network coming together on your personalized website. And thanks to those who donate, it is available 24/7 to anyone, anywhere at no cost. www.caringbridge.org

Sources:

Pinquart. M. and P. Duberstein. Associations of social networks with cancer mortality: a meta-analysis. Critical reviews in Oncology/Hematology. 2010 75(2): 122-37

National Cancer Institute Grant No. R01CA129059. Molecular Profiles and Lifestyle Factors in Breast Cancer Prognosis (LACE3)

Use the worksheet below to map out your social network and individuals you may connect with during course of your treatment.

My Social Support Network

Immediate Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

Extended Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

Friends
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

Neighbors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

House of Worship
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

