

How to Tell Others You Have Cancer



No one plans to be told they have cancer. You might feel shocked, confused, or angry after your diagnosis. All these feelings and more can make it hard to know how to tell the people closest to you. Talking about your diagnosis is a personal decision. But having the support of family and friends can help you feel less alone. Here's some advice to help you share your news with others when you're ready.

Check in with yourself

There are many reasons why you may not want to share your diagnosis. Telling other people can make it feel more real and scary. You may be afraid that it will change how other people see you and your abilities. It can also be hard to know how someone will handle the news. But try not to worry too much about how other people will respond. Think about what works best for **you**.

Prepare to share your news

How you feel about sharing your news may change from one day to the next. That's to be expected. Consider these tips:

- **Take time to adjust to your feelings.** Talking about your diagnosis may make you feel helpless or powerless. You may feel disappointment, anger, and sadness. Remember that all your feelings are important and valid. It's OK to let your emotions show when you tell others about your diagnosis. You may even find that you feel better after you share your news with loved ones.
- **Don't feel pressure to share everything.** Your family and friends may have many questions. It's OK to say you don't have all of the answers right now. It's also OK to answer the most important questions at first and leave the others for another time. Whenever you don't feel like talking about your health, be honest. Let people know. It's OK to keep some things private.
- **Share health updates in one place.** Write down information about your diagnosis and care plan and keep it handy. This can help you explain your news to many different people at the same time. You can send group emails with information or use a website to provide updates. Even better, ask a loved one if they can help you handle this task if you prefer.

Decide who you want to tell

Make a list of who you want to share your news with first. You may want to start with immediate family and close friends. They will be the most affected by your diagnosis. If you choose, you can share your news with other people once you feel more comfortable.

If you're telling children about your diagnosis, try to keep your explanation simple. And reassure them whenever possible. It may be helpful to have another family member or a professional counselor there to help with any questions.

When people say the wrong thing

At times, people may say something you don't appreciate. They may want you to be positive when you're not feeling upbeat. They may ask questions you don't want to answer. They might compare your experience to that of someone else they know. Try to prepare a response in advance in case these things come up. You might say, "I'd prefer not to talk about that right now." Or gently ask them to listen rather than giving you advice. Most people are trying to be supportive. You may find that interacting frequently with certain people may not be the best for you.

Talking with your employer

Figuring out if and when to tell your employer and coworkers can be slightly more complicated. It depends on your diagnosis and if you need to take time off for your care. It may be helpful to ask a professional counselor for advice. Know your rights. You may qualify for the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or an employee assistance program (EAP). You may need to talk with someone in human resources about your options. Some people may choose to tell coworkers about their health in an email or verbally in a meeting. It's up to you to decide if you want to share your diagnosis. And how much detail to provide.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Let your loved ones know where and when you need help. This allows them to step up and provide support. And it will help you take the time you need to rest and care for yourself. Here are some ways your loved ones can help:

- Take you to and from appointments
- Deliver meals or snacks during the week
- Do household chores, provide childcare, or run errands for you
- Provide others with health updates

You may just be starting to share your news. Or you may be coming to loved ones later on to ask for help. But always try to be open and honest. Know that your support network is there to do just that—to support you during this journey. So take a deep breath and remember: You've got this.

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