

Support Through Prostate Cancer Journey

Learning that someone you love has cancer brings up a range of emotions—fear, confusion and anxiety are some of the most common.

Partners and family members of men diagnosed with prostate cancer—or other cancers, for that matter—often struggle with how best to support their loved one through this journey.

First, when it comes to prostate cancer, it's important for both men and their partners to recognize that there are reasons to be optimistic. Advancements in screening and diagnosis, along with new leading-edge treatment options have dramatically increased prostate cancer survival rates in the past two decades. In fact, many men diagnosed with the disease—especially when detected early—continue to enjoy long, fulfilling lives.

Still, there will be times when your partner needs support, particularly in the early stages of diagnosis. He may need input to make decisions about treatment options, which may include surgery or radiation. In cases of low-risk prostate cancer tumors, “active surveillance” may be recommended as the best way to manage the disease. And while monitoring can replace or delay the need for more invasive treatment, some men are uneasy living with cancer that's not actively being treated.

Having unconditional love and support is helpful during a time when people often feel vulnerable and isolated. Here are some specific ways you can make your partner's journey easier:

Keep the lines of communication open

Ensure your partner knows that you are available to listen or talk—and that you are there for him. If you're attending doctor visits with your partner, take note of information or issues that could potentially cause worry in case your partner wants to discuss them later. Having someone close to confide in may also be valuable in dealing with common side effects from prostate cancer treatment, which may include incontinence and decline in sexual function.



Stay positive

While you are likely to have your own fears and concerns related to your partner's diagnosis, as a support person, it's important to try and maintain an upbeat attitude and highlight the positive aspects of the journey. Keeping a good sense of humor is a highly effective way to deal with stress, so look for every opportunity to laugh together.

Plan shared activities or special events

Participating in activities you both enjoy is a great way to take your mind off of the situation and relieve stress. Take the initiative to suggest a special "date night" or plan an outing.

Use the opportunity to set goals for the future

When there is the likelihood of a successful outcome—as is the case for many men with prostate cancer— couples and loved ones often use the time to dream, plan and set goals for the future. A personal experience with cancer—and surviving it—can motivate individuals and couples to set new priorities and commit to new ways of living and enjoying life.

Nurture your own well-being too

As you consider how to best support your spouse or partner through his prostate cancer journey, be mindful of how you personally are handling the situation. It's common to experience stress that's unique to caregivers. It's normal to be fearful or anxious about the possibility of losing your partner.

"Spouses and caregivers experience their own fears and worries," said Christy Krieg, MSN, CUNP, family nurse practitioner, IU Health Urology.

"As a caregiver or spouse, you may also need a source of support within or outside of the relationship."

Depending on your individual needs, help is available from a variety of sources, including friends and family members, healthcare providers, therapists, and religious leaders.

