

What does cancer feel like?

During my own journey with cancer I remember some people feeling so uncomfortable around me; they wanted to see me, but they just didn't know what to say or not say. I understand—cancer is scary. The people who came to visit cared about me and wanted to do something to make the situation better. They would ask all kinds of questions. Very often, I found myself trying to make them feel better.

I remember one day visiting friends with a 13-year-old son. He asked me a question that I had never been asked, "What does cancer feel like?" I actually appreciated that he just really wanted to know. I had never been asked that question and, I guess, my answer was that I didn't feel sick. In fact, I didn't feel anything but healthy, really. I felt only some side effects of treatment. That is what made it so surreal for me; one day I was enjoying my pregnancy and the next, I was fighting for our lives.

If you know someone who has been diagnosed with cancer, or is living with cancer, it can be hard to know what to say or do. When it comes to supporting a friend there isn't a rule book, everyone is different. Some things that I appreciated include:

Learning about the diagnosis before you visit. It can be physically and emotionally tiring to repeat the same information to different people. Contact a person who is in the know and find out the basics. Don't ask for additional information that is not shared.

Remembering that your friend may look different: loss of hair, pale, weight changes, fatigue, etc. Prepare yourself. Instead of commenting on any appearance changes, tell them "It is good to see you." We've included more suggestions on how to support a friend with cancer on page 20.

The most important thing to remember is that everyone has their own journey with cancer—all present different challenges and obstacles to get a person through it. Friendship and love are powerful. Having people help you through it or, as the Martina McBride song says, "love you through it" is powerful beyond measure. I will never forget all the people who loved us through it.

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