

## About the term “partner”

What is a partner?

The term “partner” may have a different meaning to you than it does to someone else. In general, it means “the person to whom you are closest.” This person is usually (but not always) a non-blood relative and may be your spouse, partner in life, boyfriend, girlfriend and/or your best friend.

## Co-survivor

Your partner is a co-survivor. Co-survivors are family, friends, health care providers or others who are there to lend support, from the moment of diagnosis, through treatment and beyond.

As with any major illness, breast cancer can have far-reaching effects beyond the person who is diagnosed. Co-survivors may feel many of the same emotions as you: shock, sadness, fear, anger and denial.

Family and friends can be strong sources of support but remember they may need support too.



## Lean on each other...

Breast cancer is a disease full of unknowns. You and your partner may have questions and concerns. Share your feelings with each other. For example, you may say, “I know you’re afraid. I am too. Let’s talk about it.”

## Together through it all

Think about your relationship with your partner. You’ve been through both happy and sad times together. Your diagnosis may be shocking at first, but with time you’ll learn that breast cancer is a disease that can be treated. For some people, going through something serious – like breast cancer – brings them closer.

However, breast cancer can also strain relationships. Some people may even notice a withdrawal of emotional support from their loved ones. At a time when they are needed most, the people closest to you may be less supportive than usual.

Don’t be afraid to talk about your feelings though. If either of you holds your thoughts, worries and fears inside, this can create a wall between you and may cause you to grow apart. A good place to start may be a simple open-ended question such as, “What makes you feel good today and how can I help you?”

If you’re having trouble, you may be interested in [support groups](#) for couples. You can find out about these from your health care team. Listening and talking to others who are also going through this experience may help. You can discuss anything from the most general topics (like nutrition) to the most personal topics (like sex).

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For more information, visit [komen.org](http://komen.org) or call Susan G. Komen’s breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 10 PM ET.

# TALKING WITH YOUR PARTNER

## Resources

### Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN  
(1-877-465-6636)  
[komen.org](http://komen.org)

### American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery program

1-800-ACS-2345  
[cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

### Cancer Support Community

1-888-793-9355  
[cancersupportcommunity.org](http://cancersupportcommunity.org)

### Caregivers Action Network

202-454-397  
[caregiveraction.org](http://caregiveraction.org)

### Men Against Breast Cancer™

1-866-547-MABC (6222)  
[menagainstbreastcancer.org](http://menagainstbreastcancer.org)

## Related educational resources:

- Support After A Breast Cancer Diagnosis
- Talking with your Doctor
- Talking with your Children
- What's Happening to Me
- Co-Survivors
- Sexuality & Intimacy
- What's Happening to Mom
- What's Happening to the One We Love

## How your partner copes

Your partner might feel the same way you do. They may also feel they need to be “strong” for you and hide their emotions. They may feel helpless or overwhelmed that they can’t “fix” your cancer. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Help them focus on the things they can control. They may feel better by:

- Helping you find information
- Talking with others
- Releasing emotions by exercising
- Escaping by reading books, listening to music, watching movies or spending time with friends
- Writing down their thoughts



## We're all human...

We need support from others. If you have trouble talking with your partner, ask someone else to help. This might be your doctor, another member of your health care team, a friend or a family member.

Getting support from others will not only help you – but it could also help your partner.

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