
GIRLFRIEND'S GUIDE TO SUPPORTING A FRIEND THROUGH BREAST CANCER



My Friend/Neighbor/Sister/Aunt just got diagnosed with breast cancer. What do I do?

I have gotten this message more times than I can count...with 1 in 8 women being diagnosed with breast cancer, it's inevitable that this will be a continued inquiry. I actually love and feel honored when people reach out to me with this. During my personal journey, I was so incredibly blessed with support and feel like I'm the non expert go to person to be able to help with what to do when someone you love has been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Just a little background so that you know you are getting this guidance from a reputable source! At the age of 38, I was diagnosed with Stage 3 Grade C Invasive Ductal Carcinoma. I underwent 9 rounds of chemotherapy, a double mastectomy, 28 rounds of

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radiation, an oophorectomy, reconstruction surgery, lymphedema treatment and several other medical obstacles along the way. At the time of diagnosis, I had been married for 12 years with a one year old, a seven year old and a ten year old.

Here are some of the most helpful things along my journey along with Amazon links to keep it simple for you!

Assign a point person for organization

This is SUPER helpful. Find the person in your tribe who doesn't mind being the 'go to' for scheduling and contact. This person can be in charge with heading up all of the items listed below as well as keeping others afloat of any changes and communication.

Surprise family photo session

Having a special photo party can be pretty therapeutic for your friend. She will have some meaningful pictures to look back on and remember the woman that she was. But here's the deal...don't put pressure on her! We all know family photos are so stressful! So don't put the stress on her to get outfits together and have her hair and makeup done and all that. HAVE IT ALL SET UP FOR HER!!! Surprise her and just have her show up at a certain time without knowing what's going on.



Extra idea: One group take her out to lunch or happy hour. Have the other group at her house getting kids and husband totally ready. Have someone there to do her hair and makeup for when she shows up.

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“1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Chances are this guide will come in handy to support the people you love.”

– NATALIE TUMAN, SURVIVOR

Thank you Postcards

Your friend will want to tell everyone thank you but will struggle with keeping up and also with HOW to thank everyone. By having these thank you postcards made, you can simply help her to address them and get them sent out. Remember those surprise pictures that you helped set up at the beginning? Use one of those

and attach to these cards. It's an easy way to let others know how grateful she is without putting the pressure on her to do more than she's mentally able.

Recommended vendor: <https://tinyurl.com/yyakb6au>



Create a Chemo Bag

Find a fun bag that she can take with her to each chemo session. Don't worry, you'll have a list of all the things to include in the bag for her... But having this to carry with her to each treatment does a couple of things:

- 1) It will remind her of you, and make her feel your presence and love with each treatment.
- 2) It is so convenient to be able to keep it packed and ready for each session.

Contents can include:

Biotene mouth wash: Dry mouth is a huge side effect of most chemotherapy medications. Not just that, but mouth sores and more. Biotene is an alcohol free mouth wash that can help combat that side effect. Get her a few different travel sized bottles...one for the chemo bag, one for the car, one for her purse, one for her nightstand. <https://amzn.to/3o6pD2q>



Jesus Calling: This is the BEST devotion that I can recommend. Mine is so broken in and used that it's falling apart at the seams. Having a small copy of this to keep in her chemo bag or at her bedside is such a gift. There may be times when she feels angry and doesn't want to open this up, but knowing it is there can be so incredibly uplifting for her. <https://amzn.to/2FLyDsz>

Journal: One of the best things that your friend can do for herself is to journal her entire experience. It doesn't have to be for anyone else besides HER. But to have it to look back on for each step of her journey is not just therapeutic but it can also be helpful for others. I can promise you that someone she knows will eventually be diagnosed or know someone who is diagnosed. They will reach out to her for questions and possibly guidance. By having a journal of

her journey she will be able to answer all of her questions. It's also really incredible to look back and read when she is on the other side. Encourage her to write her true feelings and struggles as much as possible! <https://amzn.to/34gxXom>

It's Not Supposed to be This Way: This book is a MUST for any woman in general. But when going through breast cancer, it is so relevant. I think ALL of us can be frustrated and wonder why in the world is this happening? Life was NOT supposed to be like this! This book brings it all home and gives comfort to knowing that she is not alone in her thoughts. It will help her to feel normal in all of her emotions. <https://amzn.to/35eVUvv>

Hard candy (jolly ranchers): When starting chemotherapy, she will have her port flushed prior to each infusion. It is flushed with saline which seems quite neutral and not a big deal. WRONG. That smell and taste becomes

so nauseating over time that it can be pretty traumatic. Sucking on hard candy while her nurses prep her for treatment can be so helpful! <https://amzn.to/31noQ3y>

Lavender sachet (or any type of scent she likes): Again, just the smell of the flushing of her port or the chemo lab in general can flip her stomach. If she has something to place under her nose while they get her prepped for her infusion, it will help her to stomach the whole process. It might even become her little security source that can bring comfort not just while in the chemo chair but at home when she is feeling down or while she is at different appointments. <https://amzn.to/3keMCWQ>

Inspirational bracelets and/or necklace: Get online and search for any motivational sayings that can be engraved onto bracelets or a necklace for here. Chances are, she will have some sort of treatment routine. There will be a 'go to' shirt she'll wear or 'go to' routine she does each day she has treatments. Having these bracelets to stare at while she sits in the chair receiving her infusions can be part of that routine. It's just one more way to let her know that in those times she is by herself, she is never alone <https://amzn.to/34dteDS>



Fuzzy socks: It can get cold in those infusion rooms! Being able to kick off her shoes and put on some cozy socks can help ease the anxiousness and get a bit relaxed. She can put those fuzzy socks on, wrap up in a blanket and get to work reading her book or journaling to help pass the time. And it's ok to keep the humor alive, it helps in so many ways!!! <https://amzn.to/3o4dOtH>

Blanket: This is pretty common gift for women going through cancer. But let's be real, can you ever have too many amazing blankets or throws? I think not! Get her a blanket that can roll up into her chemo bag that she can snuggle up with during each treatment. It will be something that she will always hold near and dear to her. <https://amzn.to/3m6iOfC>

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Lip Balm: Every bit of her body will dry out. Her mouth, her lips, her skin...so having some really moisturizing chapstick or lip balm will be so helpful. She can keep it with her in her chemo bag and next to her bed so that it is always available. Try to get her one that is not drying. <https://amzn.to/37ou0zX>

Good hand cream: Again, her hands and feet will be so dry during all of this. Find a really great hand cream. If she already has a favorite one, load her up on that! Make it special to her so that she knows you thought of her specifically. A few I recommend are: <https://amzn.to/2FKo5K6>

Port Pillow: Assuming she will have a port placed to administer the chemotherapy, a port pillow is super helpful. That area can be quite tender for the duration of treatment, so this helps when driving in the car. It wraps around the seat belt to give a bit of cushion to prevent it rubbing

too much. If she has to have a mastectomy, this can also help alleviate discomfort following that procedure as well. <https://amzn.to/35gETkH>

Mastectomy Pillow: If she has a mastectomy, this pillow is such a life saver. It is so hard to get comfortable after that procedure, so any help is welcomed! It helps to alleviate any unwanted pressure to the surgical site and keeps posture in alignment. <https://amzn.to/3o8WcN3>

Cold Mittens and Booties: Not every patient will need this! One side effect of a common chemo therapy used to treat breast cancer is neuropathy. A way to help keep that at bay is to wrap the hands and feet in ice throughout the chemo session. This restricts the blood flow to those areas which will in turn help to prevent the chemo from flowing freely to the extremities. Both mittens and booties can be helpful in this case! Mittens: <https://amzn.to/34fJrZu>, Booties: <https://amzn.to/3dGUVZ3>

Do some special things for the family

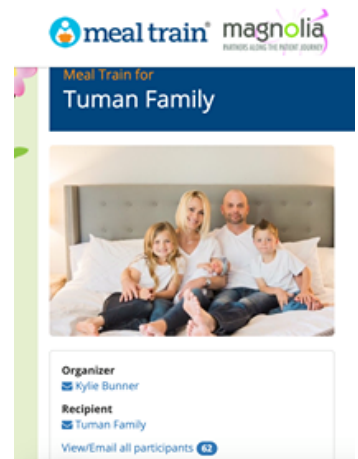
One of the biggest things during her journey is focusing on HER fighting this fight. If she is worried about the rest of the family, it takes her energy away from where she should be focused. Here are ways you can take that stress off of her by focusing on her family needs so that she can just FIGHT:

Meal Train: LIFE.SAVER. Seriously, this is one of the BIGGEST must haves during the whole process. It may not be necessary to do it every night, but at least a few times during the week. Make sure you list out the places and things that the family members like best...it just makes it so much easier for those providing the meals. Your friends may not have an appetite or it may change, so just making sure the family is fed should be the biggest priority. And always include a fun treat for the kids ;) Put on the instructions to not ring the doorbell or knock...depending on the day, they may not be emotionally or physically able to have company. So keep a cooler on their porch and have the food provider just text when it is there. www.mealtrain.com

Gift cards for food out or grocery store: Everyone has to eat!!! Load the family up on gift cards so that it's not even a thought when they need to get something to eat. We all love gift cards, so why not share the love?

House Cleaner: For real. The house doesn't get any cleaner just because she isn't feeling well. The chores and housework will still pile up. Maybe everyone contributes money to get her some help. Or maybe you take turns cleaning for her. Either way, just know that any help with housework takes one thing off her plate so that she can keep focusing on resting and healing. <https://cleaningforareason.org/>

Yard person: The grass keeps growing and growing and growing. Taking this chore off the to do list allows time to be freed up for other important things. It allows your friend to not have to worry about it and the spouse to be able to focus on spending time with the family and doing things that will be remembered rather than just one more task to take care of. Find a teenage kid in the neighborhood that would do it for a minimal fee!



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Errand runner: Dry cleaning, random grocery pick ups, school activities, etc. Take turns by having one person each week in charge of random errands. Have your friend keep a list and once a week she gives that to you to go out and get things done for her.

Take the kids: Don't ask, just do it! Take them for a morning, an afternoon, the night, whatever, but just take them!!!! Laying in bed recovering takes so much energy. When she hears the hustle and bustle of the household outside of her door, she feels a pull and an obligation to get out there and be present. Don't let her. Take the chaos outside of her house and let her just be.



Kid Buckets: Load those kiddos up on all things that make them feel seen. Each child will deal with their mother's diagnosis differently so letting them know that they aren't traveling alone is so special. Make each bucket personal to them... find out what candy they love or what crafts they enjoy or what movies they like.

Husband Buckets: Those husbands go through more than we can ever imagine. They are having to put on a strong front while on the inside they are scared to death and want to crawl in a hole to hide until this is all over. Pay attention to them. Take them to Happy Hour, send them meaningful messages, drop off their favorite meals or treats. Find out what they like best and make sure they don't get lost in the mix. They're the rock during this ordeal and their entire world has forever changed!

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Additional Things That are SUPER Helpful

Treatment day surprises: There's something uplifting when people just remember that it's the day of doom, lol! Maybe it's her favorite drink sitting on her porch when she is leaving for treatment. Or maybe it's her favorite cookies delivered when she gets home. Maybe it's some fresh flowers on her bedside so she sees them every time she rolls over to get a drink. Find something meaningful and surprise her on her treatment days.



Fundraising shirts: People are always looking for ways to help and this is a HUGE one. Not only will you and the community be able to visibly show your support, but you will also be able to financially give assistance when it is so desperately needed. Find a vendor who will team up with you to design a fun shirt in support of your friend and who agrees to give all proceeds to the family.

Texts: Make them random. Send funny memes or inspirational quotes or prayers...don't expect anything in return but just send her sporadic messages so that she knows you are thinking of her. Maybe get on a rotation with your crew so that she is receiving encouragement consistently. You never know what is going through her mind and that text just might save her from crumbling on

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- NATALIE TUMAN, SURVIVOR

the floor that day.

Gift cards for IV treatments: Research shows that having additional IV fluids and minerals can be helpful to the recovery process. Find a treatment option in your area that will go to her house to administer IV fluids. Give her a set amount of visits so that she knows they'll be showing up. Don't expect her to go anywhere, but having them do house calls and having the payment already taken care of is a HUGE blessing to her!

Hope Kit from NBCF: These can be ordered from the National Breast Cancer Foundation and include many of the items listed above. It is a box that is mailed to the patient full of items that make them feel cared for and loved. It usually includes socks, tumbler, journal, tea, lotion, lip balm and a bracelet. Depending on their donations and volunteer opportunities, there could be quite a wait list, but it's always fun for your friend to receive this in the mail. www.nbcf.org

Support Group: Send her to 'Girlfriend's Guide to Fighting' where she can have access to other women who are going through or have been through her same battle. This is a group of fighters that will offer her REAL conversations and REAL support without the gloom and doom that so many other resources turn into. www.facebook.com/groups/girlfriendsguidetofighting

Bottom line is this is going to take your loved one some time to process all that is happening. Be patient, but be there! There is no right or wrong way to handle this journey, so just make sure she doesn't feel alone. When in doubt, just show up.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17

*Always in my prayers,
Natalie Tuman*