



The Cancer Recovery Pyramid: Support Resource #3

Find a Postive Support Group

Do you need a support group? Consider this evidence: Cancer patients who regularly participate in support group meetings live longer than those who do not.

Research at Stanford University confirmed what cancer survivors have known for decades. In a study of patients with advanced breast cancer, those who attended a weekly support group session had a life expectancy twice that of the non-attenders. Further research at UCLA and King's College in London confirmed the value of attending support groups. The message is clear: We truly need one another for survival.

Distinguish between the two major types of support groups: clinical and psychosocial.

Clinical groups communicate basic knowledge on a wide variety of oncology issues. Topics may include types of treatments, common side effects, physical therapy following surgery or how to live with an ostomy. The idea behind this type of support group is to inform.

More critical to survival are *psychosocial support groups*. These are supportive, therapeutic programs that focus on emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of cancer.

Look for groups that take a stance of hope without denying the reality of the illness. At meetings, you should expect to express your own fears and frustrations freely and allow others in the group to do the same. You'll learn from the responses of the group members who have overcome cancer, and you'll contribute to those who are just beginning the cancer recovery journey.

One warning: A potential problem with any type of support group is that instead of encouraging personal growth, groups may quickly turn into a "pity party." While there is significant value in allowing people to talk out their problems, the discerning group needs a leader to judge when the talking is therapeutic and when it is rehearsing, and reinforcing, a problem. The "cyber-solace" provided in on-line chat groups is no exception.