

Practical advice for carers and friends of NHL patients

If a friend, relative or someone you care about has been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) it's often difficult to know what to expect or how you can support them. Just being there for them and making the time to listen and offer practical and emotional support whenever it's needed is a good start.

Learning about what your relative, friend or partner will be facing at different stages of the disease, as well as what they could be doing to help themselves, can help you begin thinking about what you can do to support them, both practically and emotionally. The following offers some tips and advice on some practical considerations. More detailed information for both you and the sufferer can be found at www.lymphomalife.com

Visiting the doctor, hospital or clinic

Ask your partner, friend or relative if they would like you to go with them to their appointments

Visiting the doctor, hospital or clinic can sometimes be a frightening experience for someone with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL), as well as their carers. They may often be apprehensive about what will happen or what they will find out, and many experiences may be new and bewildering for them. Having someone close go with them can often help with this and means you can be there to support them if they need it.

Offer to take notes during important appointments

Visiting the doctor for consultations can sometimes be a confusing experience. Your partner, relative or friend will need to take in a lot of new information during an appointment and it can be difficult for them to remember everything that they will need to know, especially since being diagnosed with NHL is a heavy emotional burden. Making notes during an appointment and helping them think of all the questions they would like to ask can really help with this, and could be something your friend or relative may appreciate your assistance with. Suggested questions to ask the doctor are available to print out on the lymphoma life website (www.lymphomalife.com).

Help arrange transport to and from the doctor's office, hospital or clinic

This sounds simple, but for your partner, friend or relative to know that they don't have to worry about how they'll get to and from an appointment can be a great weight off their mind. A patient will have more important things to consider on the day of an appointment than worrying about driving or which buses or trains to catch. And, particularly if your partner, friend or relative is going for treatment, they may not be feeling well enough after an appointment to get home by themselves. So any help you can provide with transport arrangements could be really useful.

Ultimately, just being with them, especially in the first period after diagnosis, when the emotional load is highest, and most is unknown, can be a huge support for your loved one.

Practical advice for carers and friends of NHL patients

Practical, everyday help

There may be times when your partner, relative or friend might need help with everyday chores

People with NHL can often feel very tired, or become tired quite easily. Understanding this and offering to help with basic day-to-day tasks such as cooking, shopping or cleaning can sometimes be really appreciated. Not expecting them to be able to do too much during these times can also be very important.

However, you should bear in mind that there may also be times when your friend or relative will be feeling reasonably well and able to manage on their own. So try to be sensitive to how they are feeling – be available should you be needed, and help them get back to normal at other times.

Helping your friend or relative plan their diet and taking over food preparation can sometimes be useful

People with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma can often experience weight loss. A prolonged lack of appetite and sometimes even nausea and vomiting are not unusual, particularly when they are undergoing treatment. So making sure your partner, friend or relative has a nutritious, balanced diet can be really useful. If you can help them avoid food preparation and encourage them to eat several small meals throughout the day, it might help keep their appetite up.

Remember, you are not alone

It's not unusual to feel guilty about having concerns and worries of your own at a time when your partner, friend or relative is having to deal with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. But there is no reason for you to feel like this.

It is also quite common to feel isolated and alone when you are concentrating on caring for someone who is ill, especially if you can't maintain the social network you had before your partner, friend or relative became ill.

However, you are not alone. There are a number of sources of support for carers. The lymphoma team at the specialist clinic, your family doctor, or the patient's family doctor will all be able to offer advice.

There are also many organisations and support groups both locally and nationally that can offer practical and emotional help.