

ONE LIVER TO LOVE

Conversation Cards for Liver Cancer Care

These conversation starters are intended to present thoughtful ways of addressing the everyday needs of those living with liver cancer, as well as those who care for them. From proactive ways of asking others for help, to empathetic approaches to understanding each other's needs, these cards are here to break down barriers to effective communication.

To those living with liver cancer: asking for help does not make you a burden. You deserve the best care possible. Sometimes, that means speaking up and advocating for your needs.

To caregivers, family and friends: your efforts to provide assistance and comfort in this difficult time are deeply appreciated. Sometimes, people may not want to accept help, so it is okay to give them space. However, it is important to be persistent in matters of health.

The following topics have been developed based on insights and recommendations from leading advocacy organizations, including the Global Liver Institute and Blue Faery. Find more resources at: www.OneLiverToLove.com

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Questions for caregivers or loved ones to ask people living with liver cancer.

If your loved one needs more emotional support, consider connecting them with a therapist or support group:

“I imagine this may be a stressful time. Would you consider connecting with a mental health professional or joining a support group? I’m happy to help search for one.”

Rationale:

Therapists and support groups may provide value to anyone going through difficult times such as a liver cancer diagnosis. This approach shows that you care about your loved one and want to provide them with more emotional support.

[Watch this video on mental health in liver cancer care.](#)

If you suspect your loved one is struggling emotionally about something, try asking open-ended questions:

“It seems like you’re having a difficult time—what’s on your mind? I’m here for you if you want to talk.”

Rationale:

Opening up about emotional struggles can be difficult. This approach creates an opportunity to discuss your loved one’s concerns without putting them on the spot, providing them with the emotional space to bring up the subject on their own terms.

[Watch this video on mental health in liver cancer care.](#)

If you suspect your loved one may be stressed and could benefit from relaxing, consider providing calming choices:

“Let’s do something relaxing—would you prefer watching a TV show or playing a board game, or perhaps taking a walk?”

Rationale:

Empathy is critical when comforting someone who is experiencing stress. This approach may be appreciated because it shows that you empathize with their feelings and challenges, and it offers them a way to cope and unwind.

[Watch this video on mental health in liver cancer care.](#)

If you notice your loved one is tired, consider providing choices that encourage rest:

“Are you tired? Would you like to take a nap? Can I get you a pillow or a blanket?”

Rationale:

Rest is essential to the recovery process. This approach shows that you respect their physical needs and comfort, and it allows them to choose where and how they feel most comfortable.

[Learn more about the role of sleep when undergoing cancer treatment.](#)

If your loved one seems to be uncomfortable or in pain, ensure you're gathering as much information as possible:

“Can you describe where you're feeling pain and what it feels like? How long have you been having pain? Let's write this down so we can inform the doctor.”

Rationale:

As a caregiver, an important part of your job is to advocate for your loved one's health. Part of that responsibility is knowing when to call the doctor. Attending medical appointments and asking questions are great ways to provide support and ensure that all information is being communicated in both directions.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If your loved one wants more information or has questions about their condition, consider offering to do the research:

“Would you like me to do the research, or would you prefer to look it up yourself?”

Rationale:

Education is a necessary part of understanding a liver cancer diagnosis so you can be the best advocate for your loved one. This approach shows that you want to help find solutions and respect their independence. Keeping a health notebook is a great way to remember questions to ask the doctor. When it comes to health education, it's important to seek information from reputable sources.

[Find liver cancer information from One Liver to Love.](#)

If your loved one seems sad, consider offering choices of uplifting activities:

“Let’s get out of the house. Would you rather go out for a bite to eat, visit a museum, or go for a walk?”

Rationale:

Sometimes a change in environment can help lift a mood. Providing options to choose from removes the decision-making burden for them.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If your loved one has withdrawn from physical activities, encourage them to participate in low-intensity hobbies:

“It seems like you’ve been cooped up. Let’s get some fresh air. How about we go for a short walk in the park just to get our legs moving?”

Rationale:

Liver cancer and its treatments may make exercise more difficult. Starting slow with relaxing hobbies and activities is a great way to regain the momentum of an active lifestyle.

[Learn about mental and physical benefits of exercise for people living with cancer.](#)

Questions for people who don't live with the person who has liver cancer, but want to show support.

If you suspect your loved one could use some help with their pet, consider offering a specific gesture:

“What time do you normally feed/walk your pet? Would it be okay if I stopped by and took care of that for you?”

Rationale:

People living with cancer face a lot of challenges every day, and responsibilities such as taking care of a pet can feel like more of a chore than usual. This approach may be appreciated because it offers a direct solution to a situation for which they may not have considered seeking assistance.

[Learn about resources available to pet owners here.](#)

If your loved one is struggling to maintain a healthy diet, consider offering to meal prep for them:

“It must be so hard to prepare healthy meals when your body is feeling fatigued. I'd like to help by prepping a few things for you. Do you have any preferences?”

Rationale:

This approach may be appreciated because it alleviates the burden on them to develop a meal plan themselves. It also shows that you care about their nutritional needs, and it provides options to satisfy their preferences.

[Learn about meal planning for liver health.](#)

If your loved one needs some help managing day-to-day tasks as a parent, consider offering to help with certain activities:

“Would you like me to babysit your kids while you go to your doctor's appointment? If you're comfortable with me picking them up from school, I am happy to help.”

Rationale:

The day-to-day responsibilities of parenting may create barriers to focusing on one's own health needs. Still, those appointments are important. Providing a helping hand on practical matters may be much appreciated.

[Find liver cancer resources at One Liver to Love.](#)

Questions for people living with liver cancer to ask their caregivers.

If you're nervous about an upcoming medical appointment, express your thoughts and ask for help:

"I'm feeling anxious about my upcoming appointment. It would really help me if we could discuss it together."

Rationale:

Openly expressing your concerns and seeking support allows your caregiver to understand your anxieties and provide the necessary assistance. By sharing your feelings, you can work together to address any worries and ensure that you feel more supported. Discussing things like the questions you want to ask, and who will take notes, can help you feel more prepared for your appointment, too.

[Find one-on-one peer support from Blue Faery.](#)

If you notice changes in your health, such as new symptoms or pain, be sure to mention it to your caregiver:

"I've been feeling nauseous recently. Can you help me prepare something plain to eat? I also need your help calling the doctor to let them know I'm feeling this way."

Rationale:

While it may be difficult to bring up medical issues at times, it's important to prioritize your health. This approach addresses your concern and gives clear direction on how your caregiver can help you. Remember that you should always bring up changes in your health with your caregiver and health care team, like your doctor and nurses.

[Find more information on how to make the most of your time with health care providers.](#)

If you need assistance with preparing a healthy meal, remember it's okay to ask your caregiver for help:

"I just don't have the energy to make lunch. Can you please help me with that?"

Rationale:

Many people receiving care may be hesitant to ask for help because they're used to being independent, and they don't want to feel like a burden. By openly and honestly communicating your needs, your caregiver can provide practical, timely support. The more specific you can be, the better.

[Read insights on communicating with your caregiver and loved ones.](#)

If you're finding it challenging to keep track of medications and appointments, ask your caregiver to help develop a plan:

"I've been trying to stay organized with my medications and appointments, but sometimes it's a bit too much. Would you mind helping me create a system and a medication reminder?"

Rationale:

Staying organized is an important aspect of overall cancer care. By telling your caregiver about the issues you have, they can better understand how to assist you. This approach includes a specific action, so your caregiver can help you to stay organized and on schedule.

[Find more information on how to make the most of your time with health care providers.](#)

If you are having difficulty sleeping at night, work with your caregiver to develop sleep strategies:

"I've been so tired all day, but I still can't sleep at night. Can we talk about some ideas to create a more restful environment?"

Rationale:

Sleep is essential. Sometimes getting enough means making changes to your lifestyle. Involving your caregiver in day-to-day lifestyle changes is one way to foster a supportive relationship.

[Learn more about the role of sleep when undergoing cancer treatment.](#)

If you're feeling emotionally overwhelmed and need to talk, be open about your needs:

"I've been struggling lately, and I could really use a good listener. Do you have a minute to talk?"

Rationale:

Openness about your emotional needs is the first step in finding comfort and relief during challenging times. Your caregiver might be a good listener, but you may also find it beneficial to lean on the experience of a therapist or find a support group. When opening up, it may be helpful to let people know if you want them to help think of solutions, or just be a shoulder to lean on.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If you sense your caregiver is overwhelmed by their responsibilities, encourage them to get the help they need:

“I appreciate all you are doing for me and understand you have a lot on your plate, too. Let’s talk about some ways we can get some extra help from others, so you don’t feel like all the responsibilities are falling on your shoulders.”

Rationale:

This approach acknowledges that providing care for a loved one can be a demanding job. By sharing some of the workload with others, a caregiver can help avoid burnout so they can continue to provide their highest level of support.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If you notice that your caregiver has been prioritizing your health over their own, encourage them not to neglect their own health needs:

“I’ve noticed that you’ve been so focused on looking after me that you haven’t been taking care of things you need to do for yourself. Let’s look at our schedules and see what we can rearrange so you and I can both stay as healthy and happy as possible.”

Rationale:

Caregivers need to take care of themselves, too. This collaborative approach creates a pathway to finding the ideal balance, so everyone’s needs are met.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If this is the first time your loved one has been in the role of caregiver, especially for someone with cancer, encourage them to join a caregiver support group:

“I know this is all new to both of us, and it’s a lot. There are support groups for caregivers where people can share advice, talk about how they have been successful in handling different situations, and open up about their feelings with other people who are going through something similar.”

Rationale:

No one should feel like they need to have all the answers with little to no training. Just as there are support groups for cancer survivors, there are communities where caregivers can assist each other with both practical information and emotional support.

[Find resources for the liver cancer community from Blue Faery.](#)

If your caregiver is insisting on an aspect of your care that you disagree with, find out why it is so important to them. In matters of disagreement, raise the concern with your doctor for an expert perspective:

“We’re not seeing eye-to-eye on this. I need you to explain why you think this is the best choice for me and my health. After that, let’s discuss it with my doctor.”

Rationale:

While your caregiver should always have your best interests in mind, it’s not uncommon for conflicts to arise. Sometimes more information is all it takes to resolve a disagreement. You should never feel pressured into making health decisions that you do not feel comfortable with, so always consult a doctor for their professional insight.

[Find one-on-one peer support from Blue Faery.](#)

If you’ve been feeling too unwell to exercise, talk to your caregiver about other activities that may bring you joy:

“I’m not up for exercising, but I don’t want to sit around the house. Can you help me set up some seating in the back yard?”

Rationale:

Physical activity is essential for mental and physical health. If exercise is too much, consider hobbies or relaxing activities that don’t require much exertion.

[Learn about mental and physical benefits of exercise for people living with cancer.](#)

Questions for people living with liver cancer to ask their health care providers.

If you feel like the doctor's explanation was too rushed, or you're unclear about any of the terms the doctor used, ask them to explain while you still have their attention:

"Did you say 'metastatic'? I am not familiar with that word. Can you explain it in simpler terms?"

Rationale:

Your time with your doctor is precious, so you want to make the most of it. Doctors may use medical terms that are new and unfamiliar to you. Asking for clarification like this is a simple way to advocate for yourself. It's important to seek clarification about anything you're unsure of.

[Find more information on how to make the most of your time with health care providers.](#)

If you're unclear about why the doctor is recommending a certain type of treatment, it's okay to ask them to explain their thought process:

"Why do you think this is the best option? What is a reasonable outcome to expect with this treatment, and what are the potential risks and side effects?"

Rationale:

Treatment should be a joint decision between you and your doctor. It's critical that you understand the goals of the therapy as well as the risks and potential side effects. These types of questions will help you to communicate what's most important to you, and understand what you can expect with each option.

[Find liver cancer information from One Liver to Love.](#)

If you still have questions at the end of an appointment, speak up. It may help to write your questions down ahead of time and bring your list with you:

"I have a question about something I read online when I was doing research. I know you can't trust everything on the internet, so I want your perspective on it."

Rationale:

The doctor cannot answer questions you don't ask. By writing your questions down ahead of time, you are less likely to forget to ask them. This approach ensures that you're as informed as possible about the condition and any treatments.

[Find more information on how to make the most of your time with health care providers.](#)

If you have concerns about any side effects or new symptoms experienced, always bring them up with the doctor:

“Ever since starting this new medication, I’ve been too nauseous to eat. What are some medication and food options to help with the nausea?”

Rationale:

Side effects of medications and changes in your health should always be brought up to the doctor. It’s a good idea to write down when and how you tend to experience the side effects so you can give the doctor as much context as possible. These questions will also give your doctor an opportunity to provide strategies for reducing the discomfort.

[Read this for more questions to ask your doctor about any treatments you are taking.](#)

If you have concerns about your ability to pay for your treatment, ask the doctor about any helpful resources:

“I don’t think I can afford the co-pay for this medication. Are there any resources available to help me?”

Rationale:

By expressing your concerns, your doctor and their team can connect you with appropriate assistance. Patient advocates can guide you through insurance complexities, and nonprofit groups and drug manufacturers may offer programs to aid with medication costs. Informing your doctor about financial concerns is crucial, as they will likely be able to provide you with helpful information.

[Learn about your legal rights when it comes to health insurance.](#)

If the diagnosis is causing you emotional distress, bring up your concerns with the doctor:

“I find myself constantly worrying about what comes next. Who can I turn to for help?”

Rationale:

Asking for help can get you pointed in the right direction. The doctor and their team should know about local and national professionals, support groups, and resources that can help you cope.

[Watch this video on mental health in liver cancer care.](#)

You may wish to have a second opinion before making a treatment decision. If so, first talk to your insurance company about how that works; you will then need to have your medical history forwarded to the second doctor:

“I trust your expertise, but for a decision like this, I’d like to get a second opinion. The other doctor’s staff will be reaching out to you for my medical history.”

Rationale:

Wanting a second opinion on health care decisions is common. People get them for a variety of reasons, and most doctors should be understanding when you bring it up. By addressing these concerns with the doctor, they may even be able to refer you to a doctor whom they trust and respect.

[Find liver cancer information from One Liver to Love.](#)

If you want more information about how the doctor arrived at their decision, ask them what research is guiding their decision-making:

“I’m interested in learning more about the condition and appropriate treatments. Can you tell me more about the latest medical research that you use to guide decision-making?”

Rationale:

An underappreciated aspect of a cancer diagnosis is just how much you need to learn to fully understand your condition and treatment options. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with relevant medical information. Conversations like this foster a collaborative relationship between you and the doctor.

[Find liver cancer information from One Liver to Love.](#)

If you’re uncertain about what your health care journey will look like over the long term, ask your doctor what you should expect with future tests and procedures:

“I feel like I’ve been going from one test to another. I’ve been so overwhelmed that I haven’t had time to consider what comes next. Can you help me understand the big picture with my health care plan?”

Rationale:

Sometimes, it’s best to take things one day at a time. Other times, it helps to have a clear sense of what to expect next. By opening up about your concerns, this approach allows the doctor to set realistic expectations and to help reduce anxiety by giving you a sense of the path forward.

[Find more information on how to make the most of your time with health care providers.](#)

If you're having difficulty sleeping at night, ask the doctor for recommendations on sleep strategies:

"I know sleep is important, but I can't seem to get a full night's sleep. What strategies do you recommend to help improve my sleep?"

Rationale:

Falling asleep and staying asleep may be more difficult when undergoing cancer treatment. Your doctor may have resources for you, or even refer you to a sleep specialist who can help you find sleep strategies that work for you.

[Learn more about the role of sleep when undergoing cancer treatment.](#)

If you're interested in starting or changing an exercise program, it's a good idea to check with your health care team first:

"Before my diagnosis, I was active. Nowadays I'm too tired and nauseous to exercise, but I miss it. What options are there for someone in my position?"

Rationale:

The physical and mental benefits of exercise are well documented. If the activities you once enjoyed are too much for your body to handle, finding other low-impact activities is a great way to stay in motion.

[Learn about mental and physical benefits of exercise for people living with cancer.](#)

