

# Practical Ways to Support Chronically Ill Friends, Family and Neighbors

By Rachel Maier, MS



**WHEN PEOPLE** we care about are sick or suffering, it's natural to want to help them. We almost can't help it! But wanting to help and knowing how to help are two very different things.

Last year, a friend's son was diagnosed with terminal cancer. I wanted to help, but I felt stuck: What could I say or do to help ease the burden even a little bit? Providing comfort and encouragement is one thing; providing practical help is another. An encouraging note doesn't make dinner for someone who is too tired or emotionally wrung out to cook.

Sometimes the gap between recognizing someone needs help and knowing how to help them is wide and intimidating. We want to respect privacy and boundaries, and we don't want to intrude or be a bother. But if you've ever been through a hard time, you know how meaningful simple gestures are; all of them encourage us and help us remember we aren't facing hardship alone. We also know the sheer joy of a hot meal we don't have to cook; a bill we don't have to pay; a load of laundry we don't have to fold. No, you can't do everything — but you can do *something!*

## Five Easy Ideas

Here are practical ways you can help serve the people in your family and community who could use a helping hand. This is a short list to get you started, but once you start brainstorming, I bet you'll come up with all sorts of other great ideas!

1) *Provide meals.* Cooking is one of those daily tasks that can feel overwhelming. Set up a meal train, and invite friends and neighbors to sign up for a slot. Call your friend and tell them you'd like to provide them with one meal per week for the next three months, and ask what day of the week works best. Find out their family's favorite local restaurant, and send a digital gift card so they can get takeout on a night that works for them.


2) *Do household chores.* The last thing folks feel like doing during a really tough season is clean their house. (Can I get an amen?) Pitching in to get the house cleaned up would mean the world to someone who doesn't have the time or energy to do it themselves. Pick up their towels and return them clean, dry and folded. Set up a weekly appointment to come scrub their toilets. Send your teenager over to cut their grass or pick up after the dog on Saturdays. Go in with some friends or neighbors and hire a house cleaning service.

3) *Run errands.* Call or text and offer to pick up or return library books, run outgoing mail to the post office, pick up dog food or even do the weekly grocery shopping. You can even offer to drive them to and from medical appointments if they need that.

4) *Give gas cards.* From attending physical therapy to picking up prescriptions, folks with chronic conditions are often on the go. With all the extra driving, a gift card for gas would be a welcome blessing. Grab a gas card in the checkout line at the grocery store, and send it in a "thinking of you" card through the mail, drop it by their house or include it in a care package.

5) *Offer to babysit.* As willing as they are to devote their time and energy to their chronically ill kids, parents rarely get a break. Offer to watch the child(ren) while the parents enjoy a massage, catch a movie or grab dinner. Or, if the parent is the one who is chronically ill, offer to have the kids over for ice cream while they attend to their own needs.

## Better Than Nothing

Maybe you're tempted to feel like what you have to give is too small to make a difference, so why even bother? You're right: You can't change or fix their situation. Here's what I've learned: What you *can* do is ease their burden, even if it's just for one day. Talk to the person in need. Listen to their needs. Give them something unexpected to make them smile. Offer what you have, then give it with a cheerful heart — and you'll be blessed in the process, too! 



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### *Spoonful of Comfort Care Package*

Send a handcrafted care package with hearty, homemade soup, rolls and cookies, or choose a combination of comfort food and gift items such as snuggly blankets, cozy socks or candles. The soup is flash frozen and sent fresh directly to your loved one's door in eco-friendly gift packaging inside an insulated bag with ice packs. With traditional, gluten-free and vegan options, there's something to feed just about everyone. *Soup gifts start at \$99.99; [www.spoonfulofcomfort.com](http://www.spoonfulofcomfort.com)*

### *Shell Gas Gift Cards*

A prepaid gas gift card is a great way to help take some of the stress off of your loved one's wallet. There are over 14,000 Shell stations around the country serving millions of Americans each day. Both physical and digital gift cards are available. (Check to make sure there's a Shell station near your loved one; if not, consider purchasing a gift card for their local gas station.) *Choose an amount up to \$200 per card; [www.shell.us/motorist/ways-to-pay/shell-gift-card.html](http://www.shell.us/motorist/ways-to-pay/shell-gift-card.html)*



## Shopping Guide for Practical Support



### *Once Upon a Book Club*

Once Upon a Book Club is a unique, interactive, subscription-based online community where readers receive a monthly box containing a newly released book to read for the month, along with three to five wrapped gifts with book page numbers attached to them to be opened when they reach that particular page. The monthly read-a-longs and discussion questions included with every box allow readers to interact with other subscribers and discuss the book/gifts. It's all the wonder of a book club without leaving the living room! *Starts at \$49.99; [www.onceuponabookclub.com](http://www.onceuponabookclub.com)*

### *Wag! Pet Services*

Whether your loved one needs help with daily walks, is preparing for a hospital stay or just wants their best friend to have some company — Wag! Pet Services offers any day, anytime pet care. Sign up for what is needed, and pay for the service you choose. You might consider gifting your friend a Wag! Premium Membership to give them a discount on all services (walks, drop-in visits, petsitting and more), waived booking fees, access to a free vet chat and VIP support. *\$14.99 for one month, or 119.99 for a one-year membership; [wagwalking.com/wag-premium](http://wagwalking.com/wag-premium)*



**Lotsa Helping Hands**  
CREATE COMMUNITY

### *Lotsa Helping Hands*

Easily organize help for someone in need using Lotsa Hands' centralized tool for coordinating meals and practical help for friends and family in need. This free app allows you to create a community around a person in need and includes a care calendar to schedule and sign up for tasks such as meal delivery and rides to appointments; a place to post encouraging messages; announcements to keep the support team updated on progress and other ways to help; and a photo gallery for sharing milestones and memories. *Free; [lotsahelpinghands.com](http://lotsahelpinghands.com)*

### *Molly Maid Cleaning Services*

The Molly Maid team understands that maintaining a well-cleaned home can be a challenge, so they offer custom cleaning services designed to meet unique needs and preferences. Service frequency can be adjusted to meet your needs. In addition to a sparkling clean home, Molly Maid services also minimize germs and other contaminants in the home so families can breathe easier. Less dirt and germs can also mean fewer incidents of the flu, common cold and respiratory illnesses. *Minimum \$100 purchase; [www.mollymaid.com/gift-certificates](http://www.mollymaid.com/gift-certificates)*



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