



IN HER CORNER

A MAN'S PLAYBOOK FOR
SUPPORTING WOMEN'S HEALTH



**BLACK WOMEN'S
HEALTH IMPERATIVE**

A BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE RESOURCE

BEFORE WE START: READ THIS FIRST

Black women are among the most resilient and often the most underserved people in this country when it comes to health. They are more likely to be dismissed by doctors, less likely to have their pain taken seriously, and more likely to manage health challenges in silence because they've been carrying everything for everyone else.

When she finally tells you what's going on -- that's significant. That means she trusts you.

Don't make her regret it.

1 in 3 Black women report feeling dismissed or not believed by their healthcare provider.¹

That number lives in every conversation she has about her health. Your job is to be the exception -- the person in her life who believes her, without question, and shows up without conditions.

KNOW THE FIELD

What she needs you to understand before anything else

The One Rule That Runs Through This Entire Playbook

Believe her. Full stop. If she says something is wrong, something is wrong. She has been living in that body her entire life. Trust that without making her prove it to you first.

"The most powerful thing you can offer is presence. Sometimes she doesn't need a plan. She needs someone beside her."

Context That Matters

Black women are disproportionately affected by fibroids, lupus, heart disease, breast cancer, and maternal health complications -- and are often diagnosed later and treated less aggressively than others. Her wariness of the medical system is not paranoia. It is lived experience built over generations.

Knowing this changes how you show up. Not with pity -- with informed, steady support.

READ THE PLAY

How to respond when she opens up

She just told you something. Maybe it's a diagnosis. Maybe it's been weighing on her for weeks and she finally said it out loud. Your response in the next 30 seconds will either open a door or close one.

Say This:

- "Thank you for telling me. What do you need from me right now?"
- "I'm not going anywhere. We'll figure this out together."
- "Do you want advice, or do you just want me to hear you?"
- "That sounds really hard. I'm glad you told me."
- "What would make today easier?"

Leave These Alone:

- "Everything happens for a reason." (She doesn't need philosophy right now.)
- "My coworker had that and she's fine." (She is not your coworker.)
- "You're so strong, you'll get through this." (Strength is not a substitute for support.)
- "At least it's not worse." (Don't diminish her condition.)
- Jumping to solutions before she's finished her sentence.

THE UPGRADE

Wanting to fix things is love in disguise. But here's the upgrade: ask before you problem-solve. "Do you want advice or do you just want me to hear you?" That one question will change your relationship.

SHOW UP READY

Active listening as a skill, not a suggestion

Good listening isn't passive. It's one of the most active things you can do for someone you love. And most of us were never taught how to actually do it.

Run This:

- **Put the phone down.** All the way down. Not face-down on your lap. Down.
- **Make real eye contact.** Not the kind that's secretly watching the game in your peripheral.
- **Don't interrupt.** Even if you have something great to say. Wait.

- **Reflect back what you heard:** "So what I'm hearing is that you're exhausted and the doctor isn't listening. That sounds really frustrating."
- **Ask open questions:** "How long have you been feeling like this?" and "What's been the hardest part?"

The three most powerful words you have:
"Tell me more."

GAME TIME

When she gets a diagnosis — the practical moves

A diagnosis lands differently for everyone. For some women it's a relief -- finally a name for what's been happening. For others it's terrifying. For many it's both at once. What she doesn't need is for you to spiral. She needs you to be the steady ground.

YOUR IMMEDIATE GAME PLAN:

1. **Show up in person.** Offer to go with her to the next appointment. Then actually go. Stay off your phone.
2. **Do your homework.** Do some basic research on your own so she doesn't have to educate you from scratch.
3. **Be her prep coach.** Help her put together a list of questions to ask the doctor before the appointment.
4. **Take notes.** Write things down during appointments so she doesn't have to hold everything in her head.
5. **Follow through.** Check in a few days later. Don't ask once and never mention it again.

RUN THE PLAY EVERY DAY

Everyday support is where most men tap out — don't

The big gestures matter. But what actually sustains someone through a health challenge is the everyday, unglamorous, consistent showing up. This is the real work.

Protect Her Peace. Literally.

- **Take things off her plate** without waiting to be asked and without making it an announcement.
- **Handle the logistics she used to handle.** Don't wait for the request.
- **Let her rest without commentary.** "You've been asleep a lot" is not helpful. Rest is medicine.
- **Make sleep a priority in your home.** Stress makes symptoms worse. Chaos makes stress worse.

Small Acts That Speak Loud:

- **Pick up her prescription without being asked.**
- **Cook dinner on the hard days.** Or order it. Either works.
- **Remember her follow-up appointment dates** so she doesn't have to remind you.
- **Check in just to check in** -- not to get a health update.

Say this more often:

"WHAT WOULD MAKE TODAY EASIER?"

Five words. Costs nothing. Communicates everything.

THE HARD PLAYS

The conversations most men go silent on — stay in them

When It Affects Intimacy

Health challenges -- from hormonal shifts to chronic illness to depression to menopause -- can change how a woman feels in her body and what intimacy looks like. This is normal. It doesn't mean the relationship is broken.

What's not okay: silence, distance, or making her feel guilty for something her body is doing. What is okay: honest, curious, pressure-free conversation.

- **Ask how she's feeling** -- not just physically, but about the two of you.
- **Express your feelings** without putting pressure on her to fix them.
- **Be open to intimacy looking different for a season.** Different doesn't mean gone.
- **If needed, involve a professional.** Couples counseling is not failure. It's investment.

When It's Mental Health

Depression, anxiety, PTSD, and burnout are health conditions -- not personality flaws and not something she can push through if she just tries harder.

- "Have you tried praying about it?" This is not a substitute for a treatment plan.
- Encourage professional support without shame. Therapy is self-care, not weakness.

- **Don't make her mental health about how it affects you.** Not right now.
- **Being calm, patient, and present without judgment** is powerful medicine.

A Note on Humor

In many Black families, laughter is how we survive. A shared joke can cut through tension and remind someone that joy still exists. But the rule is: follow her lead. If she's laughing about what her body is doing, you can follow. If she's crying, that is not your cue for a punchline.

STAY IN THE GAME

Taking care of yourself so you can keep showing up

Supporting someone through a health challenge is emotionally demanding. Acknowledging that doesn't make you a bad partner or a weak man. It makes you human.

- Find someone to talk to -- a friend, a therapist, a trusted person in your community.
- Don't disappear into caregiving at the expense of your own mental health.
- Ask for help when you need it. That's what community is for.

You can't pour from an empty cup. She doesn't need you running on empty -- she needs you present and whole for the long haul.

THE FINAL WORD

Showing up for someone doesn't always look like grand gestures.

Sometimes it looks like sitting quietly beside her while she processes something hard.

Sometimes it looks like handling the thing she didn't ask you to handle.

Sometimes it looks like saying,

"I don't know what to say, but I'm not leaving."

That kind of love is transformative. And she deserves it.

READY TO DO MORE?

Supporting the women you love is personal. Supporting all Black women is powerful. The Black Women's Health Imperative has been fighting for Black women's health equity for over 40 years -- through research, advocacy, education, and community. That work depends on people like you.

Make a donation. Share this resource. Spread the word.

Visit [BWHI.org](https://www.bwhi.org) to give, get involved, and learn more.

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¹ Pew Research Center. Black Americans' Views About Health Disparities, Experiences with Health Care. April 7, 2022.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health; American Cancer Society. Data on racial disparities in fibroids, lupus prevalence, breast cancer mortality, heart disease outcomes, and maternal mortality.