

Coping With Sadness and Depression During Cancer

Sadness is a common effect of a cancer diagnosis. You may struggle with changes in your life and your body. Long periods of sadness may lead to depression, which can be more serious. This fact sheet discusses the following topics:

- How physical health affects mental health
- Being aware of your emotions
- Getting help with depression



Mental Health Is Related to Physical Health

The way your body reacts to treatment can affect your self-image. Many types of treatments can have lasting impacts.

- **Try to be patient with yourself.** Some physical changes may come abruptly, can be permanent and hard to get used to. Try to be kind to yourself and recognize these changes come from trying to make yourself healthier. It may help to talk with others who have similar experiences.
- **Changes in weight and eating habits.** Weight gain or loss can occur due to treatment. This can happen due to poor appetite, overeating, stress or medications. Talk to your health care team if you recognize these changes at any point during and after your diagnosis to explore ways to restore your quality of life.

While they may be difficult to do, there are things that may help your overall health. These can have positive effects on your mental health.

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Keeping a balanced, healthy diet can give you the nutrition your body needs. Healthy food can improve your well-being. Most treatment centers have a nutritionist on staff who you can talk to.
- **Try to stay active.** Studies have shown that physical activity is very helpful to the mind and body. The level of activity you can do may not be as high as before your diagnosis, so consider low-impact exercise like walking or swimming. Be sure to discuss with your doctors.



Be Aware of Your Emotions

Sadness is a very natural reaction to cancer. Try to allow yourself to feel any feelings you are experiencing, as avoiding emotions can cause them to intensify. These feelings may include anger, guilt and lack of hope, as well as apathy, a lack of desire to do anything, or difficulty feeling pleasure.

People going through cancer often feel isolated, which can increase negative feelings. Try to talk to friends or family members. Even spending time with a pet can increase positive emotions. Some further ideas:

Mind-body-spirit techniques. These include yoga, meditation, visualization, tai chi, prayer and singing. For more information, read CancerCare's fact sheet "Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices."

Write in a journal. Writing about your thoughts and feelings is a good way to express and process feelings. Read CancerCare's fact sheet "Healing With Words: Journaling and Reflecting Throughout Treatment."

Support groups and counseling. Speaking with others who understand your experience can benefit you. CancerCare has a staff of oncology social workers who know what you are going through. Call 800-813-HOPE (4673) to speak with someone who can help.



Find Help If You Are Depressed

Depression is a form of clinical sadness that does not go away. It can cause you to not want to do anything or takes away the pleasure from things you usually enjoy. Depression is very common after a cancer diagnosis, during treatment or even after cancer goes away. It can sometimes take away the energy to continue to work, keep up relationships or even undergo treatment itself.

There are treatments available for depression, including counseling and medication. It is important to speak with your doctor before taking any prescription medications. An oncology social worker can help connect you to counseling or other forms of support.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include resource navigation, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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