



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

COPING WITH SADNESS THROUGHOUT AND AFTER TREATMENT

A cancer diagnosis can cause feelings of sadness, loss of interest, anxiety or anger. Even in remission, you may feel frustrated with lingering side effects or fear of recurrence. Periods of sadness following a cancer diagnosis are natural. However, extended periods of sadness can lead to depression, which can be more serious. Many medications during and following treatment can also affect one's mood.

RECOGNIZING CHANGE

Emotional well-being is a significant part of your overall health, so it's important to become aware of changes that occur. This can happen after a diagnosis, during treatment or while in remission. You may experience:

Changes in mood. You may experience anger, apathy, general discontent, guilt, hopelessness and an inability to feel pleasure. At times like this it is important to listen to friends or family if they comment on changes in your mood or if you become aware these symptoms are making it difficult to accomplish your daily tasks.

Isolation. One of the most common side effects of treatment is fatigue. Fatigue, along with changes in mood, can make you feel less social and more isolated. Unfortunately, increasing isolation often increases negative feelings. That's why it's important to maintain contact with friends and family, even if you need to modify visits to be less frequent or shorter in length.

Fluctuating weight or different eating habits. Weight gain or weight loss can occur due to poor appetite, overeating, stress, physical changes and medications. Experiencing many of these changes at once, especially if they extend over a period of time, is significant. Talk to your oncology team if you recognize these changes at any point during and after your diagnosis to explore ways to restore your quality of life.

Physical Changes. Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation can have a long-lasting impact on your body. Over time these changes can affect your self-image, which can be hard to cope with. While some changes may be permanent, it can be helpful to talk to others who have gone through similar treatments and explore how they have coped with and adjusted to the changes. It can also be helpful to remember that our bodies are changing all the time; however, following a cancer diagnosis, those changes are often very abrupt and might take longer to adjust to. Be kind to yourself during this time, and do your best to stay aware of whether physical changes begin to impact your social interactions.

TIPS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Talk to a friend or family member. Expressing how you feel to someone you trust can help you feel more in control and less burdened by challenging feelings. Reach out to family and friends for support, and recognize that each person is unique and might be able to help you in different ways. Think of the acronym FDR. "F" is for feelers, the ones you can be emotional with. "D" is for doers, people who feel better providing practical supports such as transportation, preparing a meal or helping with housecleaning. "R" is for respite types who might be good at providing distraction from the worries of cancer with a meal out, a movie or a fun afternoon.

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Maintain some degree of physical activity. Numerous research studies have shown that physical activity during and after treatment is very helpful for both the mind and the body. The level of activity might change from what you did before your diagnosis: simple walks, swimming and spending time in a local park go a long way in maintaining a healthy attitude. Because of the impact your cancer and treatment might have on you, it is important to discuss physical activities with your medical team, particularly your doctor and a physical therapist, both of whom are knowledgeable about what activities you can best partake in and what level of activity will be helpful without putting strain on your recovery.

Eat a balanced diet. Maintaining a healthy diet can give you the nutrition your body requires to stay well and make you feel like an active participant in your well-being. Most cancer centers and many hospitals have a nutritionist on staff whom you can consult on best practices. Read CancerCare's "Coping with Appetite and Weight Changes" fact sheet for more information.

Spend time with a pet. Studies have shown the value of pet therapy, which is why animal visits are becoming more common in long-term treatment centers. It has been well-documented that interacting with a dog (or other domesticated animals) can reduce blood pressure, ease stress and anxiety and contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Even small pets such as fish or birds can bring sounds and activity into a household, providing an opportunity to be needed and to care for a living creature.

Mind-body-spirit techniques. While some people may think of mind-body-spirit techniques solely as practices such as yoga, meditation, visualization, tai chi and chi gong, they can also encompass many other practices including prayer and singing.

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 case management, 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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Mind-body-spirit techniques are practices that help restore our bodies, calm our minds and reignite our hope during stress-filled days. Many hospitals and cancer centers now provide information on these techniques and groups in which to practice. Post treatment, many gyms, community centers and houses of worship also incorporate these opportunities. For more information, read CancerCare's "Cancer and Yoga" and "Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices" fact sheets.

Write in a journal. Journaling can help to reduce anxiety and release negative emotions. Writing about your thoughts and feelings, especially after being diagnosed with cancer, is a good way to help process what is happening and often helps to make the experience more manageable. Read CancerCare's "Healing With Words: Journaling and Reflecting Throughout Treatment" fact sheet for more information.

*Edited by Allison Moskowitz, LMSW
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