



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 and/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 the more serious side effect of depression. Many medications during and following treatment can also affect one's mood.

### RECOGNIZING CHANGE

Emotional strength is a significant part of your care so it's important to become aware of changes in your emotional well-being. This can occur after a diagnosis, in the middle of treatment or while in remission. Changes may include:

**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 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 isolate. Unfortunately, increasing isolation more often increases these negative feelings. That's why it's important to maintain contact with friends and family, even if you need to modify that contact.

**Weight or 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.

**Your body feels different.** Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation can have a long-lasting impact on your body. Over time these changes can affect your self-image, which in turn can create trouble concentrating, excessive crying, and irritability. While some changes might be permanent, it can be helpful to talk to others who have gone through similar treatment and explore how they have coped and adjusted to the changes. It can also be helpful to remember 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.

### 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. Reach out to family and friends and recognize that each person is individual and might be able to help in some ways better than others. 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

(over)

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.

### **Maintain some degree of physically activity.**

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, however, simple walks, swimming, and time in a local park goes a long way to 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 who 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 that you can consult with on best practices. Read our “Coping with Appetite and Weight Changes” fact sheet for more information.

**Spend time with a pet.** 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.

### **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 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 professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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**Mind-body-spirit techniques.** While most people think of mind-body-spirit techniques solely as practices such as yoga, meditation, visualization, tai chi and chi gong, they also encompass prayer and singing. 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. For more information, read our “Cancer and Yoga” and “Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices” fact sheets.

**Write in a journal.** Journaling can help to reduce anxiety. 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 our “Healing With Words: Journaling and Reflecting Throughout Treatment” fact sheet for more information.

### **INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING AND SUPPORT GROUPS CAN HELP**

**Support Groups.** A support group provides a chance to meet and interact with other people who can understand your experience. CancerCare provides support groups online, over the phone and face to face. We offer 100 online support groups each year for specific cancer diagnoses, caregivers and the bereaved that are password-protected.

**Counseling.** Face-to-face or over the phone counseling provides a safe space to voice any concerns to better cope with these changes. An oncology social worker can also help find local resources and programs that fit your needs.

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