

# Coping with Cancer-Related Sadness and Depression

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Having cancer can be very stressful. It can affect your emotional and physical health, relationships with family and friends, and your finances.

Most people with cancer feel some sadness. People sometimes feel sadness when they deal with stress or uncertainty. Fear of the unknown and not knowing what to expect can lead to sadness and worry.

Often feelings of sadness come and go, and do not lead to difficulty functioning and completing daily tasks. Family and friends may be able to give you the support you need.

**Some people when dealing with cancer feel depressed, which is a severe sadness that can last.**

Sadness that is strong and long lasting can be depression.

## What are the signs of depression?

Look for help with depression if you have several of the signs listed below and they have lasted for at least two weeks.

- Feeling sad, helpless or hopeless.
- Feeling irritable.
- Feeling worthless or having strong feelings of guilt.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Trouble making decisions.
- Lack of interest or joy in activities or hobbies.
- Thinking often about death and/or taking one's own life.
- Weight loss and/or gain and/or appetite changes.
- Changes in sleep. For example, not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much.

If you feel depressed, you may need the help of a health care worker with special training in this field. It is important to get the help you need. When depression is missed or not treated, it can:

- Make it hard for you to enjoy life.
- Make pain and other cancer-related problems feel worse.
- Add to your sense of "feeling alone".
- Have a negative effect on relationships.
- Delay your healing.
- Make it difficult to function and complete everyday tasks.

## How can I Cope with Sadness and Depression?

Coping is how you deal with stressful or difficult situations. Some of the ideas listed below can help you with sadness and depression.

- Get more light. It may help your mood if the rooms you are in are light and airy.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure that you eat regular, healthy meals and practice good sleep habits.
- Be Physically Active, within your capabilities. Take a short walk. Do some simple stretches.
- Express your feelings/let go of your tension. Try writing down how you feel. Maybe have a good cry, throw a pillow, or turn on loud music and scream. Try not to hold your feelings in.
- Pay attention to what triggers your sadness and worry. Once you know your triggers, you can plan ahead and address what makes you anxious or sad.
- Do things that you enjoy. You may not “feel like it” but doing activities that you have always enjoyed will help your mood.
- Make plans. Having things to look forward to will help improve your mood.
- Try to relax. Do whatever you find relaxing. Some good ideas might be listening to soft music, doing yoga or meditation, or getting a massage.
- Talk to someone you trust. Having someone in your life to share your feelings with can give you comfort and understanding. It can help you get through this hard time.
- Spirituality. If spirituality or faith is important to you, practice your beliefs and seek support from faith or spiritual leaders.

### Group Learning Sessions for Cancer Patients and Families:

These sessions provide education on taking control of your cancer- related sadness and depression, as well as your cancer-related worry and anxiety.

For more information or if you would like to register for an upcoming session:

- › Phone: 1-866-599-2267 (option 2)

We have video versions of each group learning session available online.

- › Website: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/cancereducation>

Your doctor or nurse can also provide support to you. If you feel you need more help you can call:

- Halifax: 902-240-8129 (Psychosocial Oncology at the QEII Cancer Care Program)
- Sydney: 902-567-8551 (Social Worker at the Cape Breton Cancer Centre)
- All other areas: 1-866-524-1234 Cancer Patient Navigators

## **Canadian Cancer Society**

The Cancer Information Helpline is a service for people with cancer, their caregivers, their families and their friends and healthcare professionals. Information specialists provide answers to caller's questions and provide information about:

- cancer treatment and side effects
- coping with cancer
- emotional support services
- help in the community
  - › Phone: 1-888-939-3333 to talk with an Information Specialist.

## **Wellspring Online programs**

Wellspring programs and services are available online at no charge for those experiencing cancer, caregivers and loved ones. The interactive group programs cover a range of topics. As well, there are many information sessions that you may find helpful.

- › Website: <https://wellspring.ca/online-programs/>

As well, you may want to contact:

### **Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions Intake Service**

The Intake team will engage patients in a brief screening process on the telephone and connect them with the service that best meets their needs.

- › Phone: 1-855-922-1122 (Monday-Friday 8:30 A.M. -4:30 P.M.)
- › Website: <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en>

### **Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line**

This service is for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis or anyone concerned about them. Available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

- › Phone: 1-888-429-8167





### Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

*Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

**Nova Scotia Health**  
[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

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The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.