

Depression and Cancer

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Most people with cancer go through some sadness. Some people feel depressed, which is a severe sadness that can last.

What is depression?

Cancer can be very stressful. It may cause changes or losses in your health and financial security. It can change how you relate to your friends and family—both now and into the future.

When you feel sad about this, family and friends can often give you the support you need.

Sadness that is strong and long lasting can be depression. If you feel depressed, you may need the help of a health care worker with special training in this field.

If you feel depressed, 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 harmful effect on relationships that mean a lot to you.
- Delay your healing.

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.
- Trouble focusing on or making choices.
- Lack of interest or joy in activities or hobbies.

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

- 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, waking up often, or sleeping too much.

Coping with depression

Coping is anything a person does to feel better. Even if coping with your great sadness needs some professional help, some of the self-help ideas listed below may help.

- **Get out of the dark.** 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 and healthy meals.
- **Exercise.** Take a short walk. Do some simple stretches. Moving can help ease aches and pains. It will also free chemicals in your body that help your mood.
- **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 you enjoy life more.
- **Let go of your tension.** Express your emotions by writing your feelings down in a book, hitting or throwing a pillow, allowing yourself to have a scream or a good cry.
- **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 can give you a great sense of comfort. It can help you get through this hard time.

If you are feeling sad or believe that you might be depressed, you do not have to go through it alone. Some sadness is normal while dealing with cancer. Depression is not a normal part of cancer but it will get better with the right treatment.

For more information contact your doctor or nurse or call:

Halifax: Nova Scotia Cancer Centre – 1- 902-473-6067

Haematology Social Worker – 1-902-473-4072

Head and Neck Cancer Social Worker – 1-902-473-4342

Sydney: 902-567-7771 (Cape Breton Cancer Centre)

All other areas: 1-866-524-1234 (Cancer Patient Navigators – please call from a land line. Will not work from a cell phone)

You may also be interested in online support groups.

Cancer Chat Canada has health care professionals from Canadian Cancer Centres leading cancer support groups. Most are available to people living in any province or territory. Web address is www.cancerchatcanada.ca.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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