

# Anxiety and Depression

---

This handout is about anxiety and depression and what to do if they happen. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns after reading this.

## Anxiety

It is normal to have many feelings after you learn you have cancer. These feelings can change from day to day, hour to hour and minute to minute. One feeling you may have is anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling of distress, worry, fear or panic. It is normal to feel anxious before, during and after treatment for an illness. Your body may react to the stress and worry about your health. You may notice that you:

- Don't feel like eating, or you eat more
- Have headaches or muscle pains
- Feel sick to your stomach or have diarrhea
- Feel shaky, weak, dizzy or your heart beats faster
- Have a tight feeling in your throat or chest or it's hard to breath
- Sleep too much or too little
- Find it hard to concentrate
- Have more pain
- Feel restless
- Find it hard to cope or keep your normal routine

Stress can keep your body from fighting disease as well as it should, so it's important to find ways to help manage anxiety. The next page suggests some things you can do.

## Things you can to do help manage anxiety

- **Talk with your doctor, nurse or social worker about how you feel.**

Tell us if you would like to speak with our spiritual care coordinator or someone who has special training in mental health.

- **Think about doing deep breathing, progressive relaxation, meditation and/or exercise.** These things may help. A basic breathing technique is to sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Breathe in slowly through your nose. Hold your breath for a few seconds, and then do a long, slow exhale through your mouth. Do this breathing technique for 10 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day.

- **Listen a guided imagery CD or recording.**

- **Do things that you enjoy and that take your mind off your illness.**

You might choose to listen to music, watch a favorite movie, spend time outdoors or talk to friends on the phone.

- **Find a quiet place to rest.**

- **Spend time in prayer or meditation.**

Your doctor may order a medicine to relieve your anxiety. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse how this medicine is working for you and if you have any side effects from it.

## Ways caregivers can help

- Stay with the patient when they are anxious. Be calm and reassuring.
- Talk about and focus on other things you would have talked to your loved one about before they were diagnosed with cancer.
- Speak with a doctor, nurse or social worker if you need help giving support to the person you care about.

## Depression

Many people with cancer feel sad or depressed. It is normal to feel sad, worried or depressed some days. But, if you have more than a day here and there where you feel sad and hopeless, this may be a sign of depression. When you're depressed, you may have very little energy, feel tired, get little joy from things that used to make you happy, or not want to eat.

Depression is sometimes a serious problem. If feelings of sadness and hopelessness seem to take over your life, you may have depression. Depression can be treated but you must speak up. If your health care team does not know you are depressed, they cannot help you feel better. When depression is not treated, people may have more problems. This is because they do not have the energy and concentration to follow through with all of the things their health care team asks them to do.

**8 common signs of depression are listed below. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have one or more of these signs almost every day.**

### Early signs of depression

- A feeling that you are helpless or hopeless, or that life has no meaning
- Loss of interest in the hobbies, things you used to enjoy or being with family or friends
- Loss of appetite or no interest in eating
- Crying for long periods of time, or many times each day
- Sleep problems, either sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in your energy level
- Problems thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of killing yourself. This includes making plans or taking action to kill yourself, as well as frequent thoughts about death and dying.

**If you ever feel like you will harm yourself or others, go to the nearest Emergency Room (ER), call 911 or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by calling or texting 988, or chatting online at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org)**

Depression can be treated but you must speak up. Tell us if you feel really down or if feelings of sadness or despair seem to take over your life.

**Call your doctor, nurse, social worker or mental health counselor right away if you:**



- Have anxiety or panic that doesn't go away, gets worse or cannot be controlled
- Feel down, depressed or like you can't cope
- Feel that you are helpless or hopeless, or that life has no meaning
- Lose interest in hobbies, things you used to enjoy or being with family or friends
- Have a loss of appetite or no interest in eating
- Cry for long periods of time, or many times each day
- Have sleep problems, either sleeping too much or too little
- Have changes in your energy level
- Think often about death and dying
- Have depression that gets worse or comes back after getting better

**Go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911 right away if you:**

- Have thoughts or plans of harming yourself or someone else
- Make plans or take action to kill yourself
- Have chest pain, problems breathing or a rapid heart rate



To reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, call or text 988 or chat online at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org).

---

This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.