

# Cancer and Emotions

A diagnosis of cancer brings with it a whole range of emotions including feelings of shock, fear, anxiety and sadness. Everyone will have their own way of managing their feelings. This information is about some of the feelings that you may experience and ways of coping that others have found helpful.



When you ask **why...** we hear you.

we hear you

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## Shock and denial

When you are first told that you have cancer, the first reactions are often shock and disbelief. These are a very normal response. At this time, you may feel that you are not able to take in the information you are given or that you ask the same questions several times. You may find that all you are able to think or talk about is the cancer, or you may not feel that you want to talk about your condition just now. As you start to process what you are going through, these feelings usually ease. You may need to reflect on your needs and what is best for you at this time. Letting your family and friends know your thoughts on this will help them to support you.

Counselling made a huge difference to me. That which has seemed intolerable became tolerable and I started to see a future for myself as someone living with cancer and not dying with cancer. This was huge for me. The shock from my diagnosis and the way it was delivered damaged me, and the counselling has healed the damage.



## Sadness

You may feel sad after you have been diagnosed with cancer. This is a natural response to feelings of loss, as you may grieve for the unexpected changes to your life plans. The sadness may be there for much of the time or it may come and go. It is ok to grieve for the future you had hoped for and that it may now be different or not as you had hoped. Talking about this to a close friend or family member may help you. Sometimes you may just feel like having a good cry. You may find that keeping a journal or creative hobbies are helpful for expressing feelings without having to talk to others. Finding ways that support you through this time may help you to feel better and more able to cope.

## Anxiety and fear

It is natural to feel anxious and fearful when you have been given a diagnosis of cancer. You may find concentrating difficult, sleep badly, be easily irritated or tire easily. You may sometimes experience some physical symptoms such as your heart thumping, a dry mouth, tense and achy muscles and nausea. These are all natural symptoms of anxiety. You may be anxious about the treatment, how you will be affected by possible surgery or the side effects of the treatment. In the early days, you may feel overwhelmed by all the information and anxious about the decisions that you need to make. Worry about changes to your family and work life may also be troubling you.

Being diagnosed with cancer can cause you to feel that your future is uncertain and that you no longer feel so in control of your life choices. For some people, finding out more about their condition and their treatment options helps to reduce the stress. Talking about your fears can allow the doctors and nurses treating you to give you accurate information which can sometimes relieve the anxiety of the unknown. Maintaining physical exercise can help with managing anxiety and stress. It can help you to sleep better and to feel more able to deal with your situation. Being active with others, such as family and friends, can also help to lift your mood while breathing exercises can reduce panicky feelings. Talking about your anxious thoughts and fears can often help you to understand them better and put them into perspective. Sometimes you may feel that you need to talk to someone who can listen to your fears and anxiety objectively. This may be your nurse, GP, hospital consultant, a counsellor, a friend or family member.

Life felt so scary, I didn't know what my future held. Cancer was on my mind all the time. Now I can make sense of my thoughts and think positively about my future. And I'm not alone. Thank you

## Depression

Sadness and depression are not the same thing. There may be times during the course of your treatment when you feel very low and sad. However, if your low mood continues and you are finding that this is affecting your ability to cope with daily tasks such as eating, sleeping, work and engaging in social activities, you may need to consider talking with your GP to get the right help and support. Depression can be triggered at times of stress. It may be related to you having a cancer diagnosis or having treatment for cancer. Sometimes, people become depressed after treatment has finished. This may feel confusing as you, and those around you, may be expecting you to get back to normal. Or, it may be unrelated to cancer and due to other events in your life that have nothing to do with cancer. Depression is not a sign of your inability to cope or a failure on your part. It may feel that this difficult time is endless but it is important to remember that depression can be treated and that there is a very good chance your mood will improve over time. Talking to a counsellor, speaking with your cancer nurse specialist, appropriate medication and self-help techniques can all help you to feel better.



## Guilt and anger

Feeling angry about having cancer is a normal reaction. You may get angry at those close to you, people who are well, or with the doctors and nurses treating you. Expressing anger when you are frightened, unwell or feeling less in control of your life is a very common reaction. Letting family and friends know that you are angry at the cancer and not at them can help you all.

Sometimes you may try to understand the reasons why you have cancer. It can be tempting to blame yourself or others, or to feel guilt and wonder whether you may have done something to cause the cancer. Doctors don't fully understand all the different factors that may act together to cause a cancer. Often, chance plays a big part rather than anything that you have done. It will be most helpful for you, to focus on taking care of yourself and getting all the support and care that you need rather than to focus on trying to find reasons.

Sometimes these intense feelings are hard to manage. Bottling up your feelings can mean that they spill out at unexpected times and can make everyone feel upset and cross. Talking about your feelings, to someone who you feel can listen to you, will help you to manage.

We rely entirely on voluntary donations from our clients, local businesses, individuals, community groups and grant making trusts.

If you would like to support our work or find out more about the emotional support we provide please do get in touch.

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why...

we hear you

Cancer  
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