

*Most people with cancer experience some sadness.
A few people feel depressed, which is severe sadness that can last for a longer time.*

Cancer and Depression

Cancer is not easy and 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 in the future.

When you feel sad, 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 not treated, it can:

- Make it hard for you to enjoy life.
- Make pain and other cancer related problems feel worse.
- Contribute to a 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.
- 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. Here are some ideas you can try on your own:

- **Get out of the dark.** It may help your mood if the rooms you are in are bright.
- **Take care of yourself.** Make sure that you eat regular and healthy meals.
- **Exercise.** Take a short walk. Do some 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 usually enjoy may help your mood.
- **Make plans.** Having things to look forward to may 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 call:

- Halifax: 902-473-6067 (Nova Scotia Cancer Centre)
- Sydney: 902-567-7771 (Cape Breton Cancer Centre)
- All other areas: 1-866-524-1234 (Cancer Patient Navigators)

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