

# Feeling Lonely or Isolated

Sometimes people with cancer report that they feel isolated and alone even among a group of people who care about them. You may be feeling separated from the usual work or social activities because your illness or treatment regimen keeps you away from your usual life. A sense of sadness or separation from others who appear to be going about their everyday lives is a normal reaction. These feelings can occur during treatment and even after treatment ends. While you may know other people with cancer, you cannot help but feel perhaps that no one *really* understands what you are going through. Please know that there are professionals, family and friends and fellow cancer survivors who do understand about these feelings and want to help. You do not need to face cancer feeling alone.

People who are significantly isolated from a support network may be at greater risk for things like depression or stress-related illnesses like heart disease. If you are concerned that you do not have the social and emotional supports to help you through the cancer experiences, talk to your doctor, nurse or social worker for help. Some feelings of loneliness are a normal reaction to being under stress and facing a serious illness. Chances are this is a short-term problem that will resolve itself as you begin to feel better. However, extreme or prolonged feelings of loneliness or actual isolation from other people and supports services can lead to depression, affect your ability to participate actively in your treatment and have a healthy outcome.

## What Can You Do to Manage Feeling Lonely or Isolated?

- Find someone to talk to about feeling lonely such as family, friends, your doctor or nurse, or an oncology social worker.
- Let your doctor, nurse or social worker know if you do not feel you have a support system to help you at home or throughout your treatment and recovery. There are many community programs that can assist you with practical concerns and help you feel less isolated at such a difficult time in your life.
- Join a support group or reach out to others in-person, online or by phone so that you are not alone. Your social worker or nurse may have some suggestions about these services.
- Seek professional help from a therapist experienced in working with cancer patients. There is nothing shameful about receiving professional counseling. Thousands of cancer survivors participate in individual, group or family counseling and find it to be very helpful in reducing the stress that cancer brings into their lives.
- Consider prayer or spiritual support. For many people, prayer and a religious or spiritual guide is a useful tool in managing feeling lonely.
- Keep a journal to record and release your feelings.

In the event that you feel so lonely and isolated that you have thoughts of harming yourself or suicide, help is just a phone call away. You can call 911 or go to a nearby emergency room. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) to be connected to a suicide prevention center in your area.