

Feeling Sad or Depressed

People with cancer and their family members are under a great deal of pressure to cope effectively with the treatments, side effects, and anxieties that accompany a diagnosis of cancer. Every single patient, at every stage of cancer, regardless of the type of treatment, deals with issues that cause some level of distress, ranging from common feelings of vulnerability, sadness, and fear of recurrence or death, to problems that are more disabling, such as clinical depression, intense anxiety, or panic. While many emotions fade over time, some may develop into depression. Having cancer does not mean that you should expect or accept feeling depressed all the time.

Overwhelming sadness or depression can affect your ability to carry out daily activities and to participate actively in your treatment. It can also make physical symptoms more severe, or even impact the treatment outcome. People's reactions will differ and will probably vary over time. But please know that you are not alone. It is important to talk about feeling sad or depressed with a family member, friend, clergy and/or health care professional.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression*:

- Ongoing sad, anxious, or empty feelings
- Feeling hopeless or feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once enjoyable, including sex
- Feeling tired all the time
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping all the time
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Thoughts of death and suicide or suicide attempts
- Ongoing aches and pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease with treatment

What Can You Do to Manage Sadness and/or Depression?

- Talk with your family, friends, doctor, nurse, clergy, and/or oncology social worker about what you are feeling. Don't wait until you are so depressed that you find you cannot function in your daily life.
- There are medications that may be helpful even while you are undergoing cancer treatment.
- Join a support group to hear how other people are managing their emotions.
- Seek professional help from a therapist experienced in working with cancer patients.
- Use humor – find something to laugh about every day.
- Many people have shared that prayer is a useful tool in managing the roller coaster of emotions.
- Keep a journal to record and release your feelings.

*From the National Institute of Mental Health, Depression and Cancer, 2014