

People with cancer and their family members are under a great deal of pressure. Coping with treatments, side effects, and anxieties that accompany a diagnosis of cancer is a lot. The cancer experience can feel like a roller coaster—with ups and downs that can and will affect your loved one's mood and emotions.

Mood changes may occur at any time during your cancer journey. Some people experience anxiety or depression right after diagnosis. Others have mood changes during treatment. Survivors even report having mood swings within moments of each other. You might feel joy that treatment is over while at the same time having a fear of recurrence. It can be common to experience profound happiness and sadness within a very short time.

While it may be frustrating or even frightening, it is important for caregivers to expect mental changes. They are just as important as physical changes to watch for. Both can be taxing on the whole family. It is normal to have a period of feeling down. However, if it turns into an inability to function and lasts for several days in a row, talk to your health care team. This may be a sign of depression, which needs to be addressed.

SYMPTOMS OF MOOD CHANGES TO WATCH OUT FOR:

- Feeling down or depressed on a daily basis
- Limited desire to do any activities of daily life or socialize with others
- Loss of energy and motivation (beyond expected fatigue post-surgery or treatment)
- Feelings of hopelessness or that life is not worth living
- Panic attacks
- Sudden changes of emotions (sudden crying or outbursts of anger)
- Changes in sleeping (sleeping all the time, or can't sleep at all)

WHAT CAN BE DONE:

- Milder mood changes can be helped by attending support groups (psychosocial support) with other people with cancer. Seeing that you are not alone in having these emotions can be helpful in coping with a cancer diagnosis.
- Help your loved one track when/how their moods change. Is it after taking a certain medication (steroids), or during a treatment? Is it right before a scheduled check-up? Understanding if there is a pattern may help you, your loved one, and your health care team address the issue.
- Some people with more serious mood changes may benefit from mental health support and perhaps medication. Consult with your health care team and/or oncology social workers. They can say what professional referrals might be appropriate (counseling, medication).

It may be hard as a caregiver to know what emotions are a “normal” part of the cancer journey and which ones may be more serious and require attention. Keep a log or journal, if helpful, and discuss it with your health care team and/or oncology social worker. Your job isn’t to diagnose your loved one. But you can help identify areas of concern and advocate for their best interests.

If you or your loved one have thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) to be connected to help in your area. You can also call 911 or go to a nearby emergency room.

General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

Cancer Support Community • 888-793-9355 • www.CancerSupportCommunity.org

American Cancer Society • 800-227-2345 • www.cancer.org

CancerCare • 800-813-4673 • www.cancercare.org

Cancer.net • 888-651-3038 • www.cancer.net

Caregiver Action Network • 855-227-3640 • www.caregiveraction.org

Healthcare.gov • www.healthcare.gov

Livestrong Foundation • 866-673-7205 • www.livestrong.org

National Cancer Institute • 800-422-6237 • www.cancer.gov

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine • 888-644-6226 • www.nccam.nih.gov

Patient Advocate Foundation • 800-532-5274 • www.patientadvocate.org

Cancer Support Community Resources

Cancer Support Community's (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org for more info.

Cancer Support Helpline® — Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon–Fri, 9 am–9 pm ET.

Open to Options® — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer® — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs. www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer.

Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs — With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation.

MyLifeLine — CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Connect with other caregivers by joining the Caregiver Support online discussion board. Sign up at www.MyLifeLine.org.

Grassroots Network — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate.

Cancer Experience Registry® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org.

The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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