

How to Manage your Depression

What are the symptoms of depression?

Physical symptoms - low energy, feeling sluggish or agitated, sleeping and eating more or less than before

Emotional/Mental symptoms - feeling hopeless or worthless, not enjoying things you used to enjoy, feelings of guilt or regret, wanting to die, worsened anxiety, having trouble thinking, concentrating and remembering things

People with cancer who have depression may:

- Want to stop treatment
- Worry a lot about cancer returning
- Focus on bad outcomes
- Not look after their health



What causes cancer-related depression?

- News that your cancer cannot be cured
- Some chemotherapy medications or hormonal treatments
- Pain or fatigue
- Changes in your body, like losing a breast
- Side effects like hair loss, nausea, or sexual problems
- Feeling a loss of what your life was like before cancer
- Depression or addiction before your cancer diagnosis
- Feeling isolated
- Learning that you have cancer or that your cancer has returned

What can I do to help my depression?

Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better and less alone. Talk with someone you trust who is a good listener or join a cancer support program. Try writing in a journal or making art to work through your feelings.

Focus on things that make you feel better

Focus on the positive parts of your life and things you can control. Spend time with people who make you laugh and avoid negative people who cause you stress. Feel grateful for the things and people that bring you joy.

Eat well

A balanced diet can help you feel more energetic and better. Ask your health care team to refer you to a registered dietitian. A dietitian can help you find ways to make a meal plan to help you feel better.

Quit smoking

People who smoke during cancer treatment often say they feel guilty about it. This can make depression worse. Visit www.smokershelpline.ca for support.

Avoid alcohol

Alcohol makes people feel more down. Even small amounts of alcohol can affect the way you feel. Visit Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca or call 1-800-565-8603.

Exercise and take care of your body

Exercise is a good way to improve your mood. It makes endorphins, which are chemicals in your body that are natural pain killers and mood boosters. Start slowly with light exercise like walking, swimming or yoga. You can exercise at any time during or after treatment.

Improve your sleep

Getting good sleep can help to give you more energy and feel better emotionally. Do relaxing activities like reading or listening to music before going to bed.

Make list of calming, enjoyable and useful activities

When you feel sad or down, get your list and choose an activity. Include things you enjoy, like going for a walk, watching your favourite TV shows or taking a bath. Also add your appointments and chores. Doing them will help you feel in control and useful.

Try relaxation activities

These may help you relax and manage your feelings and stress.

- Mindfulness meditation training
- Massage
- yoga
- hypnosis
- music or art therapy
- deep breathing
- guided imagery

Get counseling to help you cope

With professional counseling, you can learn different ways of thinking and acting to help you cope. Talk to your health care team about seeing a psychosocial oncology professional, like a psychologist or social worker.

Take prescribed medication

If your depression does not get better, you may need to take medication to feel better. Medications for depression are called anti-depressants. Your oncologist, family doctor or psychiatrist will prescribe a medication that is right for you.

Be safe- talk to your health care team before taking any herbal treatments for depression, like St. John's Wort. Natural health products may affect your other medications and treatment.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team right away, go to your nearest emergency room or call 911 if you are thinking about committing suicide or have tried to commit suicide.

For more information, talk to your health care team or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms

