



Managing Depression after Cancer Treatment

UHN

Information for cancer survivors

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

- What depression is
- What causes depression and how long will it last
- What you can do
- Where you can find more information

Patient Education

Improving health through education

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

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Many cancer survivors can feel depressed at some point during their cancer journey.

Depression can greatly affect your life and may stop you from doing the things you usually do everyday.

However, depression can be managed. You can do things to reduce your depression and you may need to see a doctor.

What is depression?

Depression means feeling sad, low or without energy most of the time.

It is normal to have some symptoms of depression during your experience with cancer.

But if you find that these feelings last longer than 2 weeks, or start to affect your everyday life, you may have depression.

Here are some signs of depression:

- Feeling tired or not having enough energy
- Changes in appetite
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Trouble sleeping or oversleeping
- Trouble remembering, concentrating or making decisions
- Moving more slowly than usual or being more restless
- Having feelings of guilt, worthlessness or hopelessness
- Thinking of hurting yourself, thinking about suicide or trying to commit suicide

What causes depression?

Many things can cause depression, especially if they give you a lot of stress:

- Being diagnosed with cancer
- Losing your job
- Going through a major change in life

People who had depression before their cancer are more likely to have it again after their cancer diagnosis. People with a close relative who had depression are also more likely to get depressed.

Depression can also be caused by biological factors such as chemical imbalances in the brain or changes in your hormone levels (for example, during menopause).

How long does it last?

Everyone is different. Some people recover from depression relatively quickly, and others struggle with depression for a long time. It is best to try to deal with depression as early as possible.

What can I do?

Here are a few tips to help you manage your depression:

Get professional help.

- Know the signs of depression by looking at the checklist above (page 2). Get counseling to help deal with major stress in your life. Getting help is not a sign of weakness.

Get enough exercise.

- Exercise helps your body be strong and healthy and reduces symptoms of depression. Exercise also makes chemicals called endorphins in your body that are your natural pain killers and mood boosters. Try to make exercise a regular habit.
- Walk, jog, swim, garden or take up another hobby that helps you get exercise. You can find the Canadian guidelines for exercise on this website: www.csep.ca

Eat healthy.

- Eating healthy helps your body become stronger. Healthy foods can help you deal with mental health problems more easily too. You can find the Canadian guidelines for healthy eating on this website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Stay social.

- Being connected to people can help you stay healthy and balanced. If you are sad or have little energy, it may seem hard to keep your friendships. Try to still spend time with family and friends, even if you are low. Some people join a support group to stay social and get help.
- Wellspring (www.wellspring.ca/downtownTO) and Gilda's Club (www.gildasclubtoronto.org) offer programs that can help you connect with other survivors.

Learn ways to relax and handle your stress.

- Try different ways to relieve tension, like yoga and meditation. Try to make your life more simple by cutting back on commitments when you can, and try to set goals for yourself that you can really achieve.

Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs.

- Sometimes people use alcohol or drugs to help with their depression. But these changes don't last, and your depression can get worse. If you need help to stop using alcohol or drugs, talk to your doctor.

Stick to your treatment plan.

- If you have low energy levels, you might want to skip your medical appointments. It is very important that you keep going to your doctor and therapy sessions even if you do not feel like going.
- If you are taking medicines for depression and you notice that you feel better, you might want to take less or stop taking them. It is very important to keep taking your medicines as prescribed. Talk to your doctor if you want to reduce, stop or change your medicine.

When should I see a doctor about my depression?

Check off any box that applies to you:

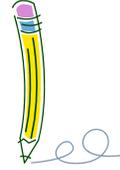
- My depression has lasted for 2 weeks
- My depression is causing me a lot of sadness
- My depression is giving me problems at work, in my relationships and other parts of my life
- I think my depression could be linked to a physical health problem
- I think about committing suicide or I have tried to commit suicide

If you checked off this box, you need to make an appointment to see your doctor right now.

If you have checked off any of these boxes, make an appointment to see your doctor.

How do I talk to my doctor about depression?

Before you see your doctor, take a few minutes to think about how depression is affecting your life.



Ask yourself these 3 questions:

1. Is my depression making it hard for me to enjoy life?

2. How bad is my depression?

For example, you can give a number between 1 and 10.

Ten means the worst depression and 1 is no depression at all.

3. What is the most stressful symptom of my depression?

Take this booklet with you when you go to see your doctor.

Talk to your doctor about your answers. Let your doctor know how you feel. Only your doctor can help with some causes of sleep problems.

What can I expect after seeing my doctor?

Your doctor will talk to you about different options that may help.

You may need special tests to find out what is happening in your body. You may need a referral to a specialist. Your doctor may also change or prescribe new medicine to see if it helps.

Where can I get more information?

See these websites for more information:

American Cancer Society

Topic: Depression

Website: www.cancer.org

Cancer Care Nova Scotia

Topic: Depression

Website: www.cancercare.ns.ca

Wellspring

Topic: Depression

Website: www.wellspring.ca

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Topic: Psychosocial distress - general

Website: www.theprincessmargaret.ca

Oncolink

Topic: Depression

Website: www.oncolink.org

Mayo Clinic

Topic: Depression

Website: <http://www.mayoclinic.com>

Mental Health Canada

Topic: Depression

Website: www.mentalhealthcanada.com

Living Life to the Full (Canadian Mental Health Association)

Website: www.llttf.ca/

Remember:

- ✓ Seek professional help.
- ✓ Get enough exercise.
- ✓ Eat healthy.
- ✓ Stay social.
- ✓ Learn ways to relax and handle your stress.
- ✓ Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs.
- ✓ Stick to your treatment plan.