

Where can I find further help?

For urgent assistance call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Books

A Cancer Patient's Guide to Overcoming Depression and Anxiety

Derek Hopko and Carl Lejuez

Dealing with Depression - A common sense guide for mood disorders

Gordon Parker, 2nd edition, 2004

Journeys with the Black Dog - Inspirational stories of bringing depression to heel

Edited by Tessa Wigney, Kerrie Evers and Gordon Parker, 2007

Emotions and Cancer

NSW Cancer Council information booklet

The Happiness Trap: Stop Struggling, Start Living

Harris, R. 2007, Exisle Publishing Limited, Wollombi

Cancer Council

Some states offer subsidised counselling services – check 13 11 20

Clinical psychologists attached to your Cancer Centre

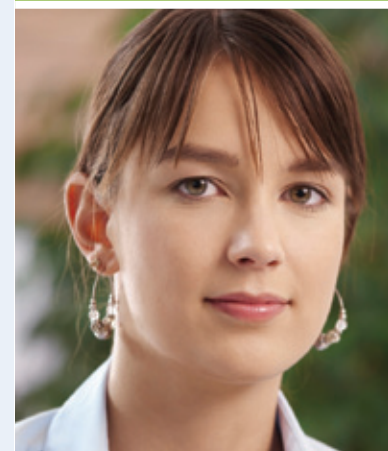
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The Double Whammy



Moving forward when you have a diagnosis of cancer and you are feeling down



To many people, the diagnosis of cancer brings many changes and challenges. When first diagnosed with cancer you may experience a range of emotions including uncertainty, anger, numbness, confusion, shock, disbelief, fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness, grief, hopelessness and lowered mood .

There will be many issues and feelings for you to address in the days and weeks following. As you deal with this significant change, and all that it brings, remember to stay focused on looking after yourself- eating properly, getting some exercise, getting plenty of rest, making sure you ask all the questions about treatment you need, moving at your own pace.

However, for some, the feelings experienced can be difficult and particularly, the sense of being “down” is something that may be challenging to handle.

What should I do if I am feeling down?

Firstly, it is important to be aware that sometimes feeling down can progress to depression.

The earlier depression is recognised and treated, the better. **Talk to your doctor if you suspect you are depressed.** Professional therapy and/or medication may be advised. Tackling it early may mean that you can deal with issues more effectively and avoid symptoms becoming worse. For some people, a diagnosis of depression may have existed before the cancer diagnosis. It is very important for people with a previous history to discuss their treatment and support with their doctor.

An anonymous depression self test can be done at the Black Dog Institute www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/depression/howtotell/selftesting.cfm

If you are feeling low there are many practical things you can do to help and start to move forward:

- Try and maintain your sleep routine. Keep a pattern of getting up/ going to bed at the same time each day
- Try and get out of bed, shower and get dressed, taking care with what you wear
- Take things one at a time and focus on completing a task you have set each day
- Allow yourself some time out each day and make time for things that relax you.
- Try to stay involved in activities you previously enjoyed and ensure that you stay connected to people. Keep it small- focus on some of your activities rather than all, mix in small groups or with those with whom you feel most comfortable.
- Try and go out for a change of scenery – a short walk or a cup of coffee at the local café.
- Try and do something each day which nurtures or pampers you in some way.
- Seek to gain a sense of control when dealing with your cancer by asking questions, gathering information about your illness, asking for a layman’s explanation and being prepared for your appointments.
- Make sure you pace your day.
- Seek support from those around you who care about you and share your feelings with them.
- Consider joining a support group.

Exercise

Exercise can help with depression but when you are engulfed by nausea and fatigue from treatment, the thought of exercise is not a pleasant one. Listen to your own body for guidance and discuss the option of exercise with your doctor.

Find a form of exercise you enjoy and start small. Consider exercising with a friend to make it easier and more enjoyable.

Meditation and Relaxation

There are many different types of and approaches to meditation, and many relaxation methods. Try a few until you find one that works for you. It should relax your body, calm your mind, help you to let go into silence.

If you have been diagnosed with depression, speak with your doctor, as some of these strategies may also help in your overall treatment.

