

COPING WITH THE EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF

Pain and Fatigue

Cancer symptoms such as pain and fatigue can affect your emotional, social and spiritual well-being.

Distress is a term used to describe unpleasant feelings or emotions that may make it harder to cope with cancer. It is normal to be distressed when you find out that you have cancer.

Distress covers a wide range of feelings, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Fear
- Stress

Distress can happen at different times. Times that patients often find most stressful include:

- Hearing the initial diagnosis of cancer
- Waiting for the first treatment to begin
- Dealing with side effects of treatment
- Completing cancer treatment and facing an uncertain future
- Follow-up visits with doctors
- Hearing news of recurrent or advanced illness
- Facing advanced stages of cancer

Distress can sometimes become more serious.

Signs of **depression** may include:

- Sad or “empty” mood almost daily
- Loss of interest or pleasure in doing things you used to enjoy
- Feeling hopeless
- Do not feel hungry or overeat (not related to chemotherapy)
- Disrupted sleep or oversleeping
- Decreased energy almost daily
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Not able to cope with pain or fatigue
- Questioning your faith or religion

Signs of **anxiety** may include:

- Feelings of panic
- Feeling a loss of control
- Anger or irritation
- Increased muscle tension
- Trembling and shaking
- Sweaty palms, racing pulse, trouble breathing
- Abdominal distress (nausea or pain in stomach)

What you can do:

Keep in mind that it is common to feel depressed or anxious while going through cancer treatment and there are ways to lessen these feelings.

- Talk with your doctor or nurse about these feelings and ways to treat them.
- Seek help through counseling (pastoral care, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists) or support groups.
- Use prayer or other types of spiritual support.
- Try to identify the situations that may be adding to your anxiety.
- Take deep breaths to help lessen anxiety.
- Write down your feelings to help you express yourself.

Contact your doctor or nurse if the following occur:

- You have thoughts of suicide
- You cannot eat or sleep for several days
- You are having trouble breathing and you feel shaky
- Nothing you do seems to help