



Tip Sheet: Coping with 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 interfere with your ability to cope with cancer. It is a **normal** to be distressed when you or a family member receives a diagnosis of cancer.

Distress covers a wide range of feelings, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Fear
- Stress

Distress can occur at different times after receiving a diagnosis of cancer or throughout the entire time. Times that patients often find most stressful include:

- Hearing the initial diagnosis
- 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 advancing illness
- Facing advanced stages of cancer

It is hard to know when **distress** is normal or becoming more serious. Certain signs of **depression** include:

- Persistent sad or “empty” mood almost everyday
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Eating problems – loss of appetite or overeating
- Sleep problems – disrupted sleep or oversleeping
- Decreased energy almost everyday
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Inability to cope with pain or fatigue
- Questioning your faith and religion



Signs of **anxiety** include:

- Feelings of panic, loss of control
- Anger or irritation
- Increased muscle tension
- Trembling and shaking
- Sweaty palms, racing pulse, difficulty breathing

What to do if you are experiencing unpleasant feelings or emotions such as **depression/anxiety**:

- Talk with your doctor or nurse about your depression/anxiety and possible ways to treat it
- Seek help through counseling (social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, pastoral care counselors) or support groups
- Use prayer or other types of spiritual support
- If possible, identify the situations that may be adding to your anxiety
- Try deep breathing exercises to help relieve anxiety
- Keep a personal journal to help you express yourself

You must 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

A number of professionals offer counseling for you and/or family when it comes to depression and anxiety: They include:

- Social Workers – help patients and families adjust to the emotional and practical problems related to illness. They focus on social functioning (community and financial resources).
- Psychiatrists – Licensed MD’s that focuses on diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. They care prescribe medications to treat psychiatric illness and conduct psychotherapy.
- Spiritual Care Counselors – focus on spiritual beliefs to reach healing and growth. They are certified and have religious training.