

Coping During Treatment

How to handle anxiety and depression

This handout explains anxiety and depression, both of which are common responses to the stress of having treatment for cancer.

Anxiety

Most people feel anxious when facing a new or stressful situation. We all feel worried at times in our day-to-day lives. You may feel nervousness, tension, panic, fear, or feeling like something bad is going to happen. Anxiety can also show up as physical symptoms such as upset stomach, sweaty palms, fast heartbeat, shaking, or flushed face.

It is normal to feel anxious when facing a life-threatening illness and its treatment. But, there are things you can do to help lessen the feelings of anxiety.



Be sure to ask for help to deal with your anxiety or depression.

What are the signs of anxiety?

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Feelings of dread or fear that last for several days.
- Physical symptoms such as sweaty palms, shaking, and rapid heartbeat. These symptoms might also be side effects of treatment.
- Wide mood swings that you cannot control.

What can I do for myself?

Even though you can lessen anxiety, it is not likely that all your anxiety will go away. Your goals are to:

- Learn how to cope with anxiety.
- Get professional help when needed.

Learn How to Cope

- Try to understand what thoughts trigger your anxiety. For example, if you are anxious about a medical procedure, ask yourself what it is about the procedure that is upsetting. Then ask yourself how you would change the procedure so it doesn't make you so anxious. Talk with staff about what you need. We may be able to make changes that will help.
- Getting the facts can help. For example, if you are worried about pain or discomfort, ask your doctor or nurse how to manage these things.
- To help reduce anxiety:
 - Think about doing things that are pleasant and relaxing.
 - Learn ways to relax, such as meditation, mindfulness, or visualization.

Get Professional Help

It is normal to feel anxiety during cancer treatment. If your anxiety does not improve even when you try different coping methods, talk with your doctor, nurse, or social worker about getting a referral to a mental health professional. It is OK to ask for help.

Depression

Many emotions arise when you are dealing with a life-threatening illness. Most patients have feelings such as helplessness, despair, and sadness during treatment. Symptoms of depression can also include loss of appetite, changes in sleep, lack of energy, and having a hard time focusing.

If you have had symptoms of depression or have been on antidepressants in the past, be sure to tell your doctor, nurse, or social worker.

What are the signs of depression?

Tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- Feel sad most of the time for several days
- Have feelings that interfere with your ability to care for yourself
- Have thoughts about hurting yourself
- Have mood swings that you cannot control

What can I do for myself?

- Know that it is normal to have feelings of sadness at times.
- Let yourself feel sad at times.
- Get professional help when needed.

Let Yourself Feel Sad at Times

- Talk about your feelings with someone who listens, such as a family member.
- Talk with other patients in your situation, such as people in support groups.
- Use your spiritual resources, such as a chaplain or religious group.

Get Professional Help

Psychiatrists and psychologists can:

- Assess the cause of your depression (it may be a side effect of some of your medicines)
- Prescribe medicine to manage your depression
- Refer you to a counselor

Ask your doctor, nurse, or social worker for a referral to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

How We Can Help

Psychiatry and Psychology Services

If you are having trouble coping, University of Washington Medical Center and the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance have psychiatrists and psychologists who can help. They can offer medicines and teach you coping skills such as imagery and behavior changes. These can help you manage stress, depression, anxiety, pain, nausea, eating or sleeping problems, or other issues that occur during illness and treatment.

Social Work

A social worker can meet with you and your loved ones anytime during your treatment at the Alvord Brain Tumor Center (ABTC). We encourage all patients to meet with our social worker for a treatment support planning visit. Set up a visit with our social worker at the clinic front desk or by calling 206.598.5258.

Social workers can talk with you about:

- **Emotional support for patients and loved ones:**
 - Planning and preparing for cancer treatment
 - Individual and family support
 - Talking with family and friends about illness
 - Counseling information and referral

- **Caregiving options:**
 - Caregiver group meetings
 - Home health referrals
 - Respite care resources
 - In-home care options
- **Resources to help your quality of life:**
 - Transportation options and resources
 - Lodging options in the Seattle area
 - Advance care planning
 - Legacy planning
 - Palliative care and hospice options
- **Legal documents and issues:**
 - Advance directive documents
 - Durable Power of Attorney
 - Workplace rights with regard to cancer and treatment
- **Financial and insurance information and resources:**
 - Connection to local financial aid programs
 - Social security disability benefits
 - Connection to and assessment for grant and foundation funds
- **Support services:**
 - Peer support resources
 - Connection to local and online support groups
 - Caregiver support resources
 - Connection to local educational classes

Supportive and Palliative Care Services

Palliative care is not the same as hospice (see “About Hospice Care” on page 5). The goals of palliative care are to:

- Prevent and ease suffering
- Support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of their disease
- Help with decision-making and provide opportunities for personal growth

You and your oncologist will make decisions about your care plan. Your oncology team will work with you to help you better understand your condition. Talk with your team about your choices for care, improving your ability to tolerate treatment, and managing everyday life.

Palliative Care providers will work with your team to provide special care for:

- Controlling pain
- Managing physical symptoms
- Coping with the stress of cancer
- Talking with your family
- Deciding what is most important to you
- Preparing for the future
- Completing paperwork:
 - Advance directives for healthcare
 - Living will
- Deciding when it is right to begin hospice care
- Promoting the best quality of life possible

If you want to talk with a provider from Supportive and Palliative Care Services, talk with your care team. We can usually set up your appointment within 1 to 2 weeks.

About Hospice Care

Hospice care is provided to patients by special nurses, social workers, and chaplains. It is designed for patients in the last 6 months of life. Hospice care is usually provided in the home with the hospice team visiting often. If it is time for hospice care, we will help you with the referral, and provide ongoing coordination of care with the team.

As needed, we will make referrals for hospice to a community organization such as Providence Transitions, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, or an agency closer to your home.

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Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

To talk with a nurse at the Alvord Brain Tumor Center weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call our Nurse Line at 206.598.9467.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, you will be given the option to speak directly with a nurse at the Community Care Line.