

Understanding

# The emotional effects of cancer

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# The emotional effects of cancer

This booklet has information on:

- How cancer might affect your emotions
- Anxiety and depression
- Things you can do to feel better
- Where to get professional support
- Talking about your cancer

### Useful numbers

Specialist nurse

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Family doctor (GP)

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Consultant

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Medical social worker

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Emergency

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Hospital records number (MRN)



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# Fast facts

## How might cancer affect my emotions? Page 10

Cancer affects your feelings as well as your body. You're likely to experience a range of emotions before, during and after treatment. Sometimes you might need professional support to help you cope emotionally.

## How can I help myself? Page 23

There are lots of things you can do to feel better. Exercise, eating and sleeping well, sharing your feelings, joining a support group and practising relaxation techniques are some of the things you might try. Part of taking care of your emotional health is to get help if you need it, so tell your doctor if you are finding it hard to cope.

## Who can I go to for help? Page 59

Your GP is a good person to talk to if you need support with managing your feelings or if you are anxious or depressed. Your cancer nurse, consultant, medical social worker and psychologist can also help. We fund free counselling online and at many local cancer support centres (see page 98).

## How can I talk about my cancer? Page 67

It can be a great relief to talk about your cancer and share your feelings, but both you and the person you're talking to may find it hard. We have some tips to help you with this.

## How will people react? Page 78

Some family members may feel uncomfortable talking about cancer. Read about how you can respond to other people's feelings.

## We're here for you Page 95

If you or your family have any questions or worries, want to know where to get support, or if you just need to talk, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses.

### Ways to get in touch

- Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700
- Drop into a Daffodil Centre to speak to a nurse. Email [daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie](mailto:daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie) to find your local Daffodil Centre.
- Email us: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

See page 95 for more about our services.

## Reading this booklet



You may find there is a lot of information to take in and that it can be hard to concentrate, especially if you are feeling anxious or worried. Remember you do not need to know everything about the emotional effects of cancer straight away. Read the parts that you're interested in and read more when you want more information. Some of the information may not be relevant to your situation.

If you don't understand something that has been written, discuss it with your doctor or nurse or another relevant professional. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

If you prefer, you can also visit a Daffodil Centre. See page 96 for more information about Daffodil Centres or email [daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie](mailto:daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie) to find your local centre.

We cannot give advice about the best treatment for you. Talk to your hospital team about your treatment and care – they know your medical history and your individual circumstances.



Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

# Emotional effects of cancer

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## Your emotions

Cancer affects your feelings as well as your body. You're likely to experience a range of emotions before, during and after treatment. Some emotional reactions happen at the time of diagnosis, while others might happen during your treatment. Or you may have a delayed emotional reaction to your cancer when you are adjusting to life after treatment. Everyone is different – there is no right or wrong way to feel. By recognising the feelings and emotions you are having, you can learn to cope better.

## How might I react to a cancer diagnosis?

The moment when you are told you have cancer may be a moment of deep distress. In fact, most people say that they have never faced a bigger or more difficult challenge.

Hearing the word cancer may feel like a death sentence at first, but these fears can often be worse than the reality. Many cancers are now curable and most can be controlled. There are also treatments to help with most side-effects.

As time goes on, you will adjust to living with cancer. It may even surprise you how well you've coped. Your family and friends will also need time to get used to the diagnosis.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700



## How might cancer affect my emotions?

Some of the more common reactions include:

- Shock and disbelief
- Denial
- Fear and uncertainty
- Loss of control
- Sadness
- Anger
- Resentment
- Blame and guilt
- Withdrawal and isolation

All of these feelings are normal. The good news is that most people are resilient and cope well after they adjust to their illness and treatment. However, sometimes a cancer diagnosis can bring greater distress and cause anxiety or depression. For more information on anxiety and depression, see page 35.

Everyone will feel different emotions and will handle them in their own way. Some days you may feel better than others. Sometimes you may experience very strong emotions that leave you feeling vulnerable and at a loss about what to do. It's best to seek help early if you develop anxiety or depression or if you feel you aren't coping with your emotions

### Shock and disbelief

Shock can often be the first reaction to a cancer diagnosis. In fact, you may feel numb and the situation may seem unreal. Because it can be hard to believe, the news may not sink in for a while or you may think the doctors have made a mistake. You may find yourself confused, asking the same questions over and over. Or you may accept the news calmly and say nothing. These are all common reactions to a cancer diagnosis.

Reactions differ from person to person – there is no right or wrong way to feel.

### Denial

After being told of a cancer diagnosis, sometimes people deny they have it or have difficulty in actually using the word 'cancer'. This can be a valid way of coping, as it gives you time to accept and deal with your cancer.

If you're in denial, you may not want to mention or discuss your illness with others. Or you might talk about your illness as if it is nothing serious. Denial may last for some time, depending on how long it takes for you to adjust to your illness.

You may wish to tell your family and close friends that you would prefer not to talk about your illness, at least for the time being. Your doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals will also understand if you don't want to be given information about your cancer until you're ready.



## Fear and uncertainty

You may have many fears when first told of your diagnosis, but in most cases, your fears will likely ease when you find out more about your cancer, understand your treatment plan and learn ways to cope.



## Fear of dying

For most people, when told they have cancer, the first thing they think about is dying. But the good news is that many cancers can be successfully treated. When a cure is not possible, some cancers can be controlled for years with modern treatments. New treatments are being developed all the time.

Learning about your illness and its treatment may help you feel more confident. Discuss your concerns with your doctor, who will give you advice and help. Share what you have learned with your family and friends, as they will probably be worried too.

## Fear of pain

Many people think that pain is part of having cancer, but some cancers cause no physical pain at all. If you do have pain, it can be controlled with very effective painkillers and other methods of pain relief such as radiotherapy, nerve blocks, relaxation and meditation.

## Fear of rejection

You may also fear that your experience of cancer will change who you are, and that people will reject or avoid you. For example, after some cancer treatments you may look different and it may take some time for you and others to adjust to your new look. In time, however, you will find ways to cope and support each other.

## Practical worries

You may also have practical worries and fears such as:

**Financial:** What will happen if I have less or no income? How will I pay for my medical bills? How will I pay my mortgage/rent?

**Job:** Will I be able to hold onto my job? Will I lose important work opportunities?

**Lifestyle:** Will I have to make big changes to my life?

**Family:** Who will look after my children or parents? What effect will my illness have on them? Looking after or supporting a family can be hard work even when you are well. Trying to juggle the roles of father, mother, daughter, son or breadwinner at the same time as coping with cancer may seem impossible. You might need to give up some or all of your responsibilities for a short period of time. As a parent, you may not be able to do all the things you usually do for your children. This does not mean that you have failed them in any way, but that you must plan your time and save your energy for the most important tasks. It is important to be realistic about what you can manage and to seek help from your partner, family or friends before things become overwhelming.



## Fear about the future

It is natural for you to be afraid or concerned about the future. Sometimes your doctor may find it hard to predict the outcome of your treatment (prognosis). Living with this uncertainty can make you feel anxious and fearful. You may not wish to make any plans or decisions. Often, not knowing what to expect can feel worse than knowing.

## Loss of control

Following a cancer diagnosis, it is common for people to feel their life is beyond their control. You may feel your life has been put on hold or that you will lose some independence and freedom.

You may not know much about your illness at first, so you may rely totally on the advice of your doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. You may not feel confident to make decisions about your treatment. This can make you feel helpless.

It takes a while to get to know what is within your control and what is beyond it. Some people want to know as much information as possible, while others are happy not to learn any extra information.

Learning about your illness and taking an active role in making decisions about your treatment can help you to feel more in control.

## Sadness

Another common feeling that people may experience when told they have cancer is sadness. You may feel sad about the loss of your good health or about plans that you must put on hold.

Depending on the type of cancer, your body image or your fertility may be affected by treatment. Then the sadness or sorrow can come from a sense of loss. This feeling of loss may come and go. If the sadness doesn't fade or becomes worse, talk to your doctor or other healthcare professional.

## Anger

People can also commonly experience anger after a cancer diagnosis. Anger can often mask feelings such as fear or sadness. You may feel angry towards the doctors, nurses or other healthcare professionals who are caring for you. If you have a religious belief, you may feel angry with God that you have cancer. You may take out your anger on those closest to you.

Your family and friends may not always be aware that your anger is really aimed at your illness and not at them. It may be helpful to talk to them when you are calm, rather than feeling guilty or trying to bottle up your angry thoughts. Anger can affect your ability to think clearly. If your angry feelings continue and you are finding it hard to talk to your family, tell your nurse, doctor or other relevant healthcare professional.

## Resentment

It is understandable that you might feel resentful and unhappy because you have cancer, while other people are well. You may also feel resentful during your treatment, for example, if another patient receiving the same treatment as you responds quicker than you do. It's best to bring these feelings out into the open, so that they can be discussed. Bottling up resentment helps no one. Instead, everyone ends up feeling angry and guilty.

Don't bottle up your feelings –  
express them.

## Blame and guilt

We often feel better or in control if we know why something has happened. If you get a cancer diagnosis, you're bound to want to know why it happened. People sometimes blame themselves or others for their illness. You may think about your diet, lifestyle, work practices, environment or family history in search of a reason. As doctors rarely know exactly what has caused cancer, there is no reason for you to blame yourself.

It's better to focus on what you can change or do to make you feel more in control of your illness.

## Withdrawal and isolation

There is no doubt that a cancer diagnosis is extremely stressful. It can leave you feeling confused and overwhelmed, with so much information to take in. At times during your illness, you may want to be left alone and withdraw from people. You may feel you need time alone to sort out your thoughts and feelings.

It's best to avoid long hours on your own every day. Sometimes depression can make you avoid family and friends and stop you wanting to talk. See page 41 for more details on depression. If you isolate yourself, it can be very stressful for your family and friends, as they will want to share this difficult time with you. Let them know that you will talk to them once you're ready. See page 67 for more about talking about your cancer.

## Anxiety and depression

It's not uncommon to feel very anxious or depressed after a cancer diagnosis. If you're feeling very worried or depressed, you may need support to help you through it. See page 35 for more about anxiety and depression.

## Feelings after cancer treatment

Once your treatment is over, you and your loved ones may expect life to return to 'normal'. However, you may find that after treatment, you have some of the following fears and emotions:

- You may feel isolated and afraid when you are no longer attending hospital as often as you were. It can feel like you are on your own because your doctors and nurses are no longer there to support and protect you.
- You might worry that the cancer will come back. As a result, you might be nervous about every ache or pain. Gradually these fears will likely fade and go away.
- You may be anxious about getting back to 'normal' life, for example, going back to work or dealing with things that have been put on hold during your illness.
- You may feel depressed or anxious and have ongoing feelings of sadness and anger.
- You may feel surprised and upset that some friends and family members expect you to pick up where you left off before your treatment.

You may feel you just want to forget about cancer and move on, but if you're finding it hard to cope with your feelings it's important to get help. Talk to your doctor, nurse, medical social worker, counsellor or other relevant healthcare professional about these feelings. Joining a support group or visiting a support centre can also help.

Healing your mind is also part of recovering from cancer. This may take some time.

## Coping with advanced cancer

If you're diagnosed with advanced cancer, it may be more difficult to manage your feelings. For example, it may be harder to feel hopeful or to cope with the uncertainty that living with advanced cancer can cause. In time, however, most people come through the initial shock and upset and find ways to cope. Some people describe advanced cancer as 'an emotional rollercoaster'. Sometimes you may feel very low, while at other times you may feel very positive and hopeful. Fortunately, new treatments mean people are living a lot longer with advanced cancer than used to be the case. For some people, advanced cancer is like a long-term (chronic) illness that they learn to manage.

There's more information on advanced cancer on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### Coping with your emotions



The first step in coping with your emotions is to recognise them. Try some of the self-help strategies on page 24. Even doing a little exercise or setting some time aside to try a relaxation technique can make a big difference.

If you're finding it hard to manage your emotions or you're suffering with worry or low mood, it's important to get help. Your mental health is as important as your physical health, so tell your hospital team or another healthcare professional if you need support.

See page 35 for more about anxiety and depression. You can also get support and advice from a cancer nurse by calling 1800 200 700 or by visiting a Daffodil Centre.

## Positive emotions

A cancer experience can also bring positive emotions. You may experience great love, affection and closeness from those around you, not only from family and friends, but also neighbours and even the healthcare team. With that can come a sense of gratitude too.

The experience of cancer can also bring personal growth and knowledge. It can make you realise where your strengths lie and what is most important in your life. You may also get the chance to do and enjoy things that you might not have done otherwise.







## Coping with your emotions

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## How can I help myself?

Everyone copes differently with a cancer diagnosis and the emotions it can bring. For example:

- Some people find it helpful to have lots of information about their illness and treatment.
- Some people get great support from talking about their illness or joining a group.
- Some people find exercising or learning relaxation techniques really helps their mood.
- Some people try to keep life as normal as possible. They choose not to think or talk about their illness.

Everyone copes in their own way, but it's good to be aware of your feelings and to be kind to yourself. Give yourself time to adapt and get help if you need it.



Your emotional wellbeing is just as important as your physical health.

## Self-help strategies

Finding ways to cope can help to improve your self-esteem, boost your confidence and make you feel more independent and in control of your illness. Some of the following strategies might help:

- **Accept your feelings as valid**
- **Get information about your cancer and treatment**
- **Talk things through with a loved one**
- **Join a self-help group or support group**
- **Get peer support**
- **Look after your health**
- **Be active**
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs**
- **Keep a diary or journal**
- **Do things for yourself**  
If possible, take part in activities or hobbies that you enjoy, especially ones that you may have done before your diagnosis
- **Release tension**
- **Try relaxation techniques**

### Accept your feelings as valid

Many people with cancer feel under pressure to be positive all the time. They feel that if they do not show a fighting spirit that their illness will get worse or return. As a result, you may feel guilty or disappointed if you have negative thoughts or low moods.

It is natural to feel low, upset or have negative thoughts sometimes when coping with a serious illness such as cancer. When you talk to other people with cancer, even the most positive of them will admit to feeling depressed and anxious at times.

Don't feel that you should have to put on a brave face when you're really finding it tough. If you feel tired, lonely, anxious, depressed or angry, acknowledge your feelings and let someone know if it helps to talk about it. If all you want to do is cry, then go ahead. Tears are a natural response to distress.

Accepting that you may have low moods and that there will be ups and down in your treatment is a positive way of dealing with your cancer. It is ok to have a bad day.

### Get information about your cancer and treatment

For some people, learning more about cancer and treatments may help to relieve anxiety. Information can help you overcome your fears about what will happen to you. It can also make you feel more in control of your illness.

If getting information about cancer makes you anxious, you could ask a friend or relative to get the information for you and tell you anything relevant or important.

It's very important, however, to get information from reliable sources. Here are some suggestions:

#### Your medical team

Your medical team knows you best and has information on your cancer, treatment and your general health. Try to get a phone number when you're at the hospital, so you can contact your medical team if you have any questions. Your GP can also be a good source of information and support. See page 83 for tips on talking to your medical team.

#### Our cancer nurses

Our cancer nurses on our Support Line or at our Daffodil Centres can answer your questions, send you helpful publications and direct you to reliable websites.



## Our publications

We have a range of free publications reviewed by cancer doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals working in Ireland. These cover different cancer types, treatments, side-effects and coping with the practical and emotional side of cancer. See page 101 for more.

### How can I get reliable information online?

There is a huge amount of information about cancer on the internet, but not all of it is reliable. It may not apply to your situation or it may be misleading or even untrue.

It's best to ask your medical team for websites they recommend. Our cancer nurses can also give you advice. Usually, the best websites are national cancer organisations such as the Irish Cancer Society and government health websites, which give information that is backed up by scientific evidence.

Go back to your doctors and nurses if you find information online that you're not sure about. Ask them to explain it or ask if it's accurate. Medical professionals know that many people use online information – they will be happy to help you.

## Talk things through

Talking about your cancer and sharing your feelings can really lift the emotional burden on you, relieve stress and anxiety and help you to feel better in yourself. But sometimes it's not easy to talk. You may feel awkward or embarrassed discussing your feelings. You may think that no one can understand what you are going through or that you or the person you're talking to may find it upsetting to discuss cancer.

Talking about cancer can be hard for you and your friends and family. There's some advice to help you start the conversation and to talk about your feelings and needs on page 67.

## Join a self-help or support group

Joining a self-help or support group is a great way to get information and practical advice, share experiences and express your fears. Groups offer a chance to talk to people who may be in a similar situation and facing similar challenges. If you live alone or feel unable to talk about your feelings with your loved ones, a support group can feel like a safe space.

If you get a bit down during your illness, support groups can help relieve your feelings of isolation and loneliness. Research has shown that people with cancer attending support groups found it improved their mood, helped them to cope better with day-to-day challenges and reduced their pain.

Not everyone finds support groups helpful or finds it easy to talk in a group. If you're not sure if it is for you, you could go along to see what it's like and then decide. For more about local support groups, see page 102.

“ I find the support centre so supporting and comforting... I was so afraid going in at the beginning but now it's my second home. ”

## Get peer support

Our Peer Support programme is a free and confidential telephone service connecting people with similar cancer experiences. Peer Support volunteers are fully trained to provide emotional and practical cancer support in a safe, responsible and kind way.

To be referred to a Peer Support volunteer, call Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.



## Look after your health

Physical side-effects like fatigue, finding it hard to sleep, pain or eating difficulties can leave you feeling down and make it harder to cope emotionally.

In the same way, emotional difficulties can cause physical problems. For example, if you're feeling anxious, you might find it hard to sleep or to eat well, while depression can lead to a loss of appetite or fatigue. This means it's important to look after your physical and emotional health to feel as well as possible. There's information on looking after your health on page 47.

## Be active

Being physically active can reduce anxiety and depression and boost your mood. It can also help with your treatment and recovery. Learn more about the benefits of physical activity and get some advice on exercising on page 51.

## Avoid alcohol and drugs

It is best to avoid using alcohol or drugs to try to cope. Alcohol and recreational drugs may make you feel better for a short time but afterwards they may leave you feeling more anxious or down. Alcohol is a depressant drug that affects the chemicals in your brain. It can initially give you a 'high' but can make you feel low in mood afterwards. Drugs and alcohol can also affect the quality of your sleep. Sleeping well is important when you have a lot to cope with emotionally.

Also be careful if you are taking any anti-anxiety medication or sleeping tablets. Stick to the dose your doctor has prescribed. Don't take these types of medicines unless they are prescribed for you. For example, don't take tablets prescribed for other people if someone offers them to you.

## Keep a diary or journal

Writing about your experiences and thoughts can help you to express your feelings, fears and worries, especially if you find it hard to talk about them with other people.

It is useful to write about what happened to you and how you feel — physically and emotionally. For example, you could record details of your treatment and when you've been feeling ill, tired or anxious.

Some days you may feel you have nothing to write about, but getting into the habit of writing something every day can boost your spirits in the long term. As your diary develops, you can look back and see how you coped, particularly during low or anxious periods.

If you are not comfortable with writing things in a journal, you might record your thoughts on your smartphone or keep a video diary.

## Do things for yourself

During your illness, you may feel that you have no control over your life. Doing things for yourself can help you to feel more independent and in control. Try to live life as fully as you can. Do things that make you feel good and are fun, as this can boost your self-esteem. At the same time, it's important to accept help and support from family, friends and neighbours when you need it.

## Avoid boredom

You may find that you have a lot of time on your hands during your treatment. If you previously led an active life, lying in bed or sitting in a chair doing nothing can be boring. Boredom can lead to anxiety or depression.

There are many ways that you can occupy your mind while you're less active. Watching TV, listening to music, podcasts or the radio, or chatting to a friend can all be welcome pastimes. Make a plan of all the things you would like to achieve, no matter how big or small. Set yourself tasks each day. Keep a diary, meditate, start a photo album. Colouring doesn't take too much energy and has been found to be a great stress reliever. Ask a friend to join you in an activity. They can help you out if you want to do something a bit tiring like gardening – most people love to feel useful.

## Release tension

There may be times when you feel you are ready to explode. Things may get on top of you and you need to let off steam. Sometimes releasing tension even for a few minutes can be beneficial. Some ways to help release emotions include:

- Having a good cry
- Turning the radio or music up very loud
- Writing things down
- Doing a physical activity, even if it's just a gentle walk outside
- Praying or meditating

## Try relaxation techniques

Relaxing every day, even for 10 minutes, is a good way to help you cope with the emotional effects of cancer. There are many ways to relax. You may have your own favourites, such as quietly listening to music or yoga. Or you may like to use relaxation, meditation or mindfulness techniques. Focused breathing exercises can help reduce stress and raise your body's level of endorphins, which are natural chemicals that boost your mood and sense of wellbeing.

Books, online videos and classes can show you how to relax or meditate. You may not find it easy at first and may need some practice before you feel confident. Many local cancer support centres have free groups where you can learn techniques such as relaxation, mindfulness and meditation.

### Progressive muscle relaxation



- Lie down in a quiet room
- Take a slow, deep breath
- As you breathe in, tense a particular muscle or group of muscles
- Clench your teeth or stiffen your arms or legs
- Keep your muscles tense for a second or two while holding your breath
- Breathe out, release the tension and let your body relax completely
- Repeat the process with another muscle or muscle group and continue on through your body

## Meditation



Meditation helps to calm your mind and let go of any distressing or depressing thoughts for a short while. It can help to reduce anxiety, improve sleep and fatigue problems and boost your immune system. You may also be able to cope better with the side-effects of treatment.

- **Pick a quiet place.**
- **Sit quietly and comfortably.**
- **Close your eyes or fix your gaze on the floor.**
- **Be aware of your breathing, but don't try to control it – breathe naturally.**
- **Let your thoughts flow into your mind.**
- **You may find it useful to pick a word, such as 'one' or 'calm', and gently repeat it if your mind wanders or is distracted by other thoughts.**
- **If you find it hard to concentrate on your breathing, put an object in front of you and focus on that.**
- **Finish by sitting quietly for a few moments with your eyes closed.**
- **Getting used to meditating can be hard at first.** You may think it is not working if you feel your mind is busy and your thoughts are racing all the time. This is normal and it will become easier the more you practise.
- **If you want help with learning to meditate, there may be classes at your local cancer support centre.** There are also online videos that can teach you how.

## Can complementary therapies help me?

Complementary therapies are activities and products that may help you to feel better when used alongside your standard hospital treatments. Complementary therapies can't treat or cure cancer, but some people find them helpful in coping with physical and emotional side-effects. Here are some complementary therapies that people have found helpful.

<b>Anxiety</b>	Hypnosis, massage, yoga, meditation, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, exercise
<b>Fatigue</b>	Exercise, massage, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b>	Acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage, hypnosis, music therapy, exercise
<b>Pain</b>	Acupuncture, aromatherapy, hypnosis, massage, music therapy, exercise
<b>Sleep problems</b>	Exercise, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga
<b>Stress</b>	Aromatherapy, exercise, hypnosis, massage, meditation, tai chi, yoga

It's very important to talk to your doctor if you're thinking of using complementary therapies. Some can interfere with your treatment or be harmful to you, even if you have used them safely before your cancer diagnosis. For example, acupuncture may not be safe if you have a low white blood cell count. Your doctor may be able to recommend therapies that could be helpful for you and give you the name of a trusted, well-qualified practitioner.

Our booklet, ***Understanding Cancer and Complementary Therapies*** has information on complementary therapies and how to stay safe. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for a free copy, or download it from [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie).

## Can spirituality and religion help me?

For some people, spirituality can be a way to find strength and meaning in times of stress. Your faith may give you hope, reduce feelings of helplessness and make you feel that you are not facing cancer alone. It may also help you to focus on what's important in your life.

Spiritual support can be given through prayer or the guidance of your religious leader. If you like, ask a relevant healthcare professional, a family member or friend to arrange a meeting. The hospital chaplain can give great comfort and support when you're faced with an illness. If you have friends who belong to a church or prayer group, you could ask them to pray for you. Knowing that people are praying for you because you are loved may bring you peace and comfort.

Spirituality and religion don't suit everyone. If you don't want this kind of support, there are many other types of support that can help you to find comfort and strength.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

# Coping with anxiety and depression

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## Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural response to a stressful situation, such as cancer. For example, you might feel anxious when you get a cancer diagnosis, before starting treatment or when thinking about what the diagnosis will mean for your health. You might also feel anxious about test results, your financial situation, how you will manage your daily life or about the cancer coming back after treatment. This anxiety can be constant or it may come and go.

Most people adjust and learn to cope with anxiety during their illness, but it's important to get help as soon as possible if you're finding it hard to cope or if it's interfering with your everyday life.

Anxiety can range from feeling a bit uneasy to intense dread and panic. It can have physical and psychological effects and it can affect your behaviour too.





## Physical effects

With anxiety you may experience some of the following:

- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Lump in your throat
- Dry mouth
- Shortness of breath
- Breathing quickly (hyperventilating)
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Hot flushes
- Racing heartbeat (palpitations)
- Chest pain
- Pins and needles
- Tense muscles, like a knot in your stomach

If anxiety is severe it can lead to panic attacks. Panic attacks are brief episodes (usually less than 20 minutes) of intense anxiety.

You may also have:

- Fatigue/lack of energy
- Sleep problems
- Headaches
- Loss of interest in intimacy or sex

Sometimes it is hard to know if anxiety or your treatment is causing some of the physical effects. For example, anxiety can cause fatigue, but treatment can too. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional, who will be able to offer you advice.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Psychological effects

What you think, feel and say to yourself when you are anxious are described as the psychological effects of anxiety. You may experience:

- Fear and dread
- Worry
- Negative thoughts
- Recurring thoughts or feelings. In other words, having the same thoughts or feelings over and over again

Some people may get confused and mixed up when they're anxious and later cannot remember what they felt. If you do experience intense anxiety, write down what you think and feel at the time. It will help you to understand what is happening to you.

## Behaviour

Anxiety can also lead us to behave or act in a certain way. If you are deeply anxious, you may be:

- Irritable or short-tempered
- Moody
- Nervous
- Tearful or easily upset
- Angry
- Easily distracted and find it hard to concentrate

## Avoiding people and places

A common reaction to anxiety is to avoid situations and people. You may delay getting tests done because you're scared about the results. Or you might make excuses to avoid seeing your family and friends. Try to get some support to help you cope with your anxiety if it's affecting your life in this way.

## Coping with anxiety

There are many ways to help you cope with anxiety. A combination of talking, relaxing, doing things that make you feel good, getting accurate, reliable information and possibly medication should help you.

If anxiety is making your life miserable, talk to your doctor, nurse or medical social worker for advice. There's more about getting professional help on page 57.

### Breathing exercises to help with anxiety



If you're feeling anxious or experiencing a panic attack, doing a breathing exercise can help calm you down. Follow these steps:

- 1 Breathe in as slowly, deeply and gently as you can, through your nose. Try to draw your breath into your belly.
- 2 Breathe out slowly, deeply and gently through your mouth.
- 3 Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5 on each in-breath and each out-breath.
- 4 Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Be gentle with yourself.

You should start to feel more calm in a few minutes. You may feel tired afterwards.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Depression

It is natural to feel some sadness during and after your illness. At times you may feel low and not your usual self. But usually people or pleasant events will cheer you up. If nothing cheers you up and you are feeling low for several weeks, it may be a sign that you are depressed.



Depression is more than just feeling sad. It's a significant medical condition that affects thoughts, feelings and the ability to function in everyday life. Depression is very common – 1 in 5 people will experience depression at some point in their lives. Depression can happen at any age.

Depression can develop slowly and may be hard for you or your family to recognise at first. Other times, it can come on very suddenly, where you feel plunged into despair and feel hopeless.

While cancer can lead to depression, being depressed is not something you should accept because you have cancer. If you are feeling depressed, it's important to get support and/or treatment to help you to manage better.

Recovering from depression takes time, just like with a physical injury or illness. People cannot just 'pull themselves together' or 'snap out of it'.

Depression can develop slowly and it may be hard for you or your family to recognise it at first.

### How does depression feel?

Depression can affect your thoughts and feelings. Signs of depression include:

- A low mood every day for most of the time
- Loss of pleasure and interest in your favourite activities
- No motivation – no desire to go anywhere or start/finish jobs
- Changed sleeping pattern – problems getting to sleep or waking early
- Poor concentration and forgetfulness
- Feelings of guilt or blame
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Feeling very sensitive or vulnerable
- Feelings of despair
- Feeling worthless
- Feeling irritable
- Crying or wanting to cry
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm

### Physical symptoms of depression

- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Loss of appetite or increased appetite – weight loss or gain
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Loss of interest in intimacy or sex

It can be hard to know if these symptoms are being caused by depression or cancer and its treatment. For example, tiredness, loss of interest in intimacy and poor appetite can be caused by depression but also treatments like chemotherapy.

But if you're feeling low or have any of these symptoms for more than 2 weeks, tell your doctor or nurse.

It's important to get support and treatment for depression sooner rather than later.



## Coping with depression

It's important to remember that depression can be successfully treated. It's not a sign of weakness or failure to experience depression or to ask for help if your low moods are getting the better of you.

Remember that you can recover from depression, even if you think it unlikely at the time. When feeling depressed, it can be hard to see things positively and be hopeful. But depression doesn't last forever. Even without treatment, your mood will eventually improve, but it may take much longer.

Self-help strategies, professional help such as counselling or antidepressants can all help to speed up your recovery.

### Suicidal feelings

Sometimes depression can become very severe. People may begin to think that their life is not worth living and that they would be better off dead. Or they may feel they are a burden to their family and it would be better for everyone if they were dead.

Tell your doctor, nurse, a relevant healthcare professional or someone close to you immediately if you experience, or if your family and friends are worried that you are experiencing, the following:

- Suicidal thoughts or plans
- Wanting to harm yourself
- Seeing or hearing things that are not real (hallucinations)
- Strongly believing things that are not true (delusions)

Your doctor may suggest that you spend a few days in hospital where you will get the necessary help and support for you to recover quickly. You will be able to talk about your ideas and feelings at this time with specially trained staff. More than likely, you will need medication to help improve your mood.

## Depression in children and teenagers

A small number of children and teenagers with cancer can become depressed. Watch out for signs that your child is becoming depressed. Your child may become quiet or moody or have eating or sleep problems. In some cases, they may become uncooperative with cancer treatments.



Anxiety usually occurs in younger children, while depression is more common in teenagers.

If you notice that your child is becoming depressed, get help for them without delay. There are very good treatments available. Individual and group counselling are often used as the first treatment for a child with depression.

If you are a teenager with cancer, you may find yourself feeling angry and frustrated. At this stage in your life, it can be very hard to cope with a cancer diagnosis, especially when you want to become more independent.



You may resent having to rely on your parents and relatives because of your illness at this time. You may be suddenly jolted into thinking about your health when you were well and strong before. Overall, it can be a confusing time for you, with many different emotions to deal with. It's normal to question your situation and why it has happened to you.



Coping with such strong feelings by yourself can often be hard. You may not find it easy to talk about such things, even with parents and close friends. If this happens, you may find it helpful to discuss your feelings with a trained counsellor. Another option is to contact a support group for young people with cancer, like CanTeen Ireland ([www.canteen.ie](http://www.canteen.ie)). This will give you a chance to talk to others who are perhaps in a similar situation.

You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 if you would like more advice or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Looking after your health

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## Fatigue

Fatigue or ongoing tiredness is a very common problem during and after cancer treatment. You may continue to feel quite tired even after treatment ends. It can take at least a year for your body to fully get over the effects of treatment. Fatigue is also common if someone has anxiety and depression.

It's important to talk to your doctor if your energy levels are low, so that they can find out what's causing it. For example, there may be a physical reason, such as a low red blood cell count, or it may be caused by stress or depression.

Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 for a copy of our booklet ***Coping with Fatigue*** or download a copy from our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)





## Hints and tips: Coping with fatigue



- **Stop before you feel overtired.** Build rest periods into your day.
- **Take some gentle exercise.** It has been shown to improve fatigue for many people.
- **Ask for help around the house or at work.**
- **If you are going somewhere special, have a rest before you go out.**
- **Save your energy for doing the things you most enjoy.**
- **Take time to relax.** Relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, yoga or massage may help you to feel better.
- **If fatigue is affecting your ability to work or study, see if you can work out a break or reduced hours until you feel ready to do more.**



## Physical activity

Physical activity can help you to feel better physically and mentally. Light exercise encourages your body to release endorphins. These are often called 'feel good hormones'. When released, they can lift your mood and sense of wellbeing. Being active can also help to:

- **Reduce fatigue**
- **Reduce some treatment side-effects**
- **Reduce anxiety and depression**
- **Look after your heart**
- **Help you to keep a healthy weight**
- **Strengthen your muscles, joints and bones**
- **Reduce the risk of other health issues**

Talk to your doctor or nurse before starting to exercise or increasing your activity. They can advise you what is best and safe for you. Be careful not to overdo it at the beginning, but instead build up gradually.

If you are feeling very low, having treatment or have advanced cancer, the thought of exercising may feel overwhelming. But even simple stretches or a short walk may help you feel better. Low levels of exercise will still release natural chemicals in your body that improve mood and wellbeing.

## Sleep problems

During your illness there may be times when you find it difficult to sleep. Often this is because you are anxious about treatment or worried about the future. You may find that you wake early and then cannot get back to sleep. Tell your doctor or nurse if you're finding it hard to sleep. Getting help to deal with any difficult feelings may also help you to sleep better.

### Hints and tips: Getting better sleep

- **Have a regular routine at bedtime.** For example, do a few gentle breathing exercises first. Avoid screens for 1–2 hours before bed.
- **Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.**
- **Have a warm milky drink before bed,** but not coffee or tea.
- **Have a warm bath with a few drops of lavender or geranium oil** to soothe you or sprinkle a couple of drops of lavender oil on your pillow.
- **Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature** – not too hot and not too cold.
- **If you can't sleep, or wake up early, do something.** Get up and read or listen to quiet music or the radio. Wait until you feel tired again and then go back to bed.
- **Listen to relaxation tapes, online videos, audiobooks or podcasts to help you get back to sleep.**
- **Don't nap during the day if it affects your sleep at night.** If naps help, try to keep them to less than an hour and have them earlier in the day.
- **Take some exercise every day, if you can.**

## Eating well

Having a balanced diet can help you to feel as well as possible. Keeping a healthy weight and eating plenty of nutritious food can help you to tolerate treatment better and feel better emotionally.

However, cancer treatment, treatment side-effects or emotional difficulties can make it harder for you to eat well. For example, some cancer drugs can make you feel sick, reduce your appetite or make food taste different. If you're anxious or depressed, you may lose your appetite or eat a lot of unhealthy foods.

Our booklet ***Diet and Cancer*** has helpful tips on diet and coping with eating difficulties. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 for a free copy or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also download the booklet at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



## Hints and tips: Eating difficulties

- **If you don't have much appetite, eat several small snacks throughout the day** rather than 3 big meals.
- **Try to make the most of when you can eat by eating nutritious, high-calorie foods.** Don't fill up your stomach by drinking before you eat.
- **If you don't feel like cooking, ask someone to help you,** stock up on healthy ready meals or use a meal-delivery service.
- **If your taste or appetite has changed, try new foods** or eat the foods that taste best.
- **If nausea (feeling sick) is stopping you from eating well, it is important to take your anti-nausea medication.** If the medication is not working for you, speak with your medical team. They may try a different medication.
- **Find a comfortable position for eating.** Standing up, sitting up or slightly reclining can help food go down better.
- **Tell your doctor if you're losing weight or finding it hard to eat for any reason.** They may also refer you to a dietitian, who can support and advise you.
- **Keep a food diary if you are having problems.** Write down what you eat and when. Also write down any symptoms you get and when they happen. You may be able to notice which foods cause which symptoms. This will be helpful for your medical team.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Dealing with pain

Pain can make you feel depressed, affect your ability to enjoy normal activities and to sleep. Always tell your medical team if you have pain so that they can help you.

Sometimes emotional difficulties like anxiety or depression can make you more sensitive to pain and less able to cope. It is important to deal with your emotions or seek treatment for your anxiety or depression. Treatment can help to reduce your pain as well as improve your mood.

## Hints and tips: Coping with pain

- **Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are having problems with pain control.** There are many different types of pain medication, so your doctor should be able to find one that works for you. Always take your pain medication as advised.
- **Ask your medical team if there are complementary therapies that may help you and that are safe for you to try.** Some people find acupuncture, relaxation techniques or gentle massage helpful, but these aren't suitable for everyone. For example, acupuncture is not recommended if you have a low white blood cell count, and some massage techniques are not advised after certain treatments.
- **Try breathing exercises.** We tend to hold our breath or take short, faster breaths when we're in pain. Breathing more deeply and slowly can help you to feel better. Focusing on your breathing may also distract you from the pain.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700



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## Getting professional support

Everyone needs some support during difficult times, especially when dealing with a serious illness. Dealing with cancer may be one of the most stressful situations you will ever be in.

It's easy to forget your emotional health when you're focused on getting through your treatment or coping with side-effects, but it's important to get help if you need it. You can reach out for support at any time during your cancer journey. Some people find they need support during treatment, while others find they need support months or even years after treatment has ended.

## Support from your doctor

A good first step is to talk to your cancer specialist or GP if you're finding it hard to cope with your emotions or you're struggling with worries or low mood. It's also important to listen to what your family and friends are saying, especially if they think you need help. Sometimes people don't realise they're depressed until they talk to a doctor.

You might like to bring a family member or close friend for support at the doctor's and to help you remember what the doctor said.

Be gentle with yourself. It is ok to feel embarrassed or disappointed that you have to ask for help, but try not to let these feelings get in your way. Your emotional wellbeing is just as important as your physical health. Tell the doctor exactly how you feel and focus on what concerns you the most. For example, if you have no desire to get out of bed or you feel like you can't manage your worries and fears.

The doctor may advise you on which kind of therapy is most suitable for you and tell you how to access it.

## Who can help me?

There are many people who can help you to cope with your feelings and emotions:

### **Counsellor**

A counsellor is trained to help people talk through their problems and adapt to their situation. In most cases, they do not give advice or answers, but guide you until you find the answers within yourself.

### **Psychotherapist**

A psychotherapist specialises in psychotherapy. This is a therapy which explores emotional issues that result in feelings of anxiety and depression. Psychotherapists help with problem solving and can help you and your family to develop more coping skills.

### **Medical social worker**

A medical social worker is based in the hospital and is trained to help you deal with any emotional or social problems related to your cancer. They can provide support to you and your family. They can also advise on practical and financial supports and services available after you are discharged from hospital.

### **Clinical/counselling psychologist**

A clinical or counselling psychologist specialises in the treatment of anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges using talking therapies. They are trained to explore what people think, feel and do, especially in stressful situations. They can help you find ways to confront your fears or improve your situation.

### **Psychiatrist**

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specialises in treating anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges with medication. Medication can be helpful at times to alleviate distress. You may benefit from seeing a psychiatrist for any of the following reasons:

- If you have severe anxiety, depression or other medical health challenges
- If there are concerns about psychiatric medications that you were on before
- If mental health challenges continue after you stop taking prescribed medication

There is no set number of times that you should visit a psychiatrist. You may need to go several times or only once. After your first visit, the psychiatrist may advise you to see a counsellor, psychologist, psychotherapist or medical social worker, or they may prescribe medication.

### **Clinical nurse specialist/oncology liaison nurse**

These are hospital-based nurses who can help you with all aspects of your cancer. You can tell them if you are having any problems coping, especially if you are in distress. They will tell you if you should talk to your cancer specialist about further therapy.

### **Oncologist/cancer specialist**

An oncologist is a medical doctor who specialises in the treatment of cancer. Oncologists have some experience helping patients deal with the emotional effects of cancer, but they usually focus on the biological aspects of disease and treatment. They may advise you to discuss your feelings and emotions with a psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor, medical social worker or your GP.



## Psycho-oncology services

In some larger hospitals, there are special units that provide psycho-oncology services. This means that you can get emotional, psychological and psychosocial care and support during your diagnosis, treatment and recovery by a team of experts. Usually the team consists of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses and medical social workers working closely together.

## Finding a therapist

It's important to find a therapist who you trust and with whom you feel there is a good fit. Don't be afraid to go to another therapist or ask to see someone else if you feel it would be better for you.

Check that any therapist you see is professionally qualified, legitimate and ideally comes recommended. There can be a big difference in the experience and qualifications of therapists. Your hospital team or GP can help you to find someone with the right training.

Your medical social worker, primary care social worker, community/public health nurse or GP can also help you find out what support is available in your local area.



## Types of therapy

There are many therapies to help you deal with strong emotions. Some focus on talking, while others focus on the relationship between the mind and the body to overcome anxiety and depression. Some therapies just involve you and the counsellor, or another type of therapist. Some therapies, like group and family therapy, involve going to counselling with others, to share feelings and support each other.

Sometimes it may take a while to find a therapy that suits you. Give the therapy a few weeks before you make any decision. If you feel that it's not helping or it's making things worse, a different type of therapy might work better for you. Talk to your doctor or therapist if you want to change.

## Counselling



The Irish Cancer Society funds free, one-to-one counselling online, by phone and face-to-face at many cancer support centres. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 for more information.

“ I found the counselling wonderful, to be able to discuss my thoughts and fears... giving the tools to help me deal with my anxiety when it strikes, for example, when waiting on scan results. It makes you feel safe and less alone. It has given me hope for the future. I am very happy and content for the moment, even though I have to live with this. ”

## Medication

Sometimes your doctor will recommend medication, such as antidepressants or other types of anti-anxiety medications. A course of medication can be very helpful in supporting you through a period of anxiety or depression. When you start to feel better and if you no longer need medication, your doctor may reduce the dose and stop the drug gradually. You may feel unwell if you stop suddenly, so always follow your doctor's advice.

### Anti-anxiety medication

The main medications used to treat anxiety are actually antidepressants. These types of medications are effective for both anxiety and/or depression, so will commonly be prescribed to treat anxiety even without depression. Your doctor will guide you on what's best for you. Some medications will relieve anxiety very quickly; other types take a few weeks to have their full effect, so you should try to keep taking them, even if you feel they're not working at first.

Drugs called benzodiazepines can occasionally be prescribed for short-term use in severe episodes of anxiety, but you need to be careful with these drugs and take them exactly as your doctor tells you to. They can be addictive and can also lose their effectiveness, so they are usually only prescribed for a maximum of 4 weeks.

### Antidepressants

Antidepressant drugs affect the levels of important chemicals in your brain so that they can lift your spirits.

It used to be thought that antidepressants take 2-4 weeks to work, however, it has been shown that they begin to work much sooner, as early as 1 week, and will continue to build over time.

It's important to stick with the drug for a while before stopping or changing it. If you have a reaction to a particular drug, your doctor may have to try other drugs to find one that suits you best.

Your doctor may advise you to keep taking the medication until you have been back to your usual self for at least 3 months or sometimes longer.

In general, antidepressants are not addictive. Most people take them for around 6 months.

Your overall quality of life is important. If the side-effects are bothering you, tell your doctor. They may change you to a different treatment. But try to cope and continue treatment if you can. The benefits in the long term are greater than the inconvenience of the early side-effects, especially if these side-effects get less severe.

### Side-effects

All medicines can have side-effects, such as feeling sick, headaches, drowsiness and constipation. However, these are usually mild and tend to be a problem only during the first few weeks of treatment. Ask your doctor about any possible side-effects.

If you are bothered by side-effects, tell your doctor. They may adjust the dose or try a different medicine.





## Talking about your cancer

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## Benefits of talking

Whether it's talking to a friend, relative, another person with cancer or a professional, such as a counsellor, many people get comfort from sharing their thoughts, worries and feelings.

- **When you are thinking a lot about something that is worrying you, it seems to get bigger.** It can become very frightening, stressful and even overwhelming. Talking about a fear or a worry often stops it growing in your mind. Once the fear or concern is out in the open and is being discussed, it often does not sound so bad.
- **Talking about something can help you to find out how you feel about it.** You may find some decisions very hard to make. However, when you talk about them, it might make it easier to decide.
- **Sharing can help you to realise your feelings and worries are normal.** If the person listening accepts what you're telling them without judgment, or has experienced similar feelings, it can help to reassure you that you're not alone in the way you feel.
- **Talking can bring you closer together.** Sharing something very emotional or personal can bring the people talking closer together and make the bond between you stronger.

These conversations are not always easy, or you may not feel like talking about your cancer. But it's important not to bottle up your thoughts and feelings. Read on for advice about who to talk to and some general tips on talking.

“ Talking about cancer made it less awful and helped ease my fears. I learned to cope and understand myself better. ”



## Who can I talk to?

The best person to talk to depends on your own situation and what you want to talk about. Some things are easier to talk about with people you're close to, but you may prefer to talk to someone you're not so close to about other things. It might be, for example, a colleague, support group, or a professional like a counsellor, nurse or medical social worker.



### Choosing the best person to talk to

The table on pages 104-105 can help you to identify people you know who are most likely to be helpful to you and who are best able to give the sort of support you need at a particular time.

Fill in as many boxes as you can with the names or initials of the appropriate people. Try to include different people in different boxes so that you are not relying on just a few people for everything. However, you might find that some boxes remain empty and that the same name appears in several boxes.

## Family and friends

You may feel most comfortable talking to people who know you and care about you. If you have a partner, friends or family members, it's likely you've shared feelings and worries in the past. On the other hand, people who care about you are more emotionally involved and you may worry about upsetting them or burdening them with your worries. You may also find it hard to deal with their reactions if they get upset. You may find it easier to talk with people who are less involved in your situation. This may be another relative, a religious leader or a work colleague.

### Are your loved ones lost for words?

While they may be very keen to help you, people who care about you may feel uncomfortable talking about cancer. Some reasons for this are:

- They have no idea what to say, especially if they haven't had to talk about serious illness before.
- They may feel that they should know what to say but don't.
- They may not know where to start or be afraid of upsetting you by saying the wrong thing.
- They may be worried they'll get upset and make you feel worse.
- They may be unsure of what you want and not know how to ask you.
- They may be worried how to respond if you cry or get angry.

### Other people who have had a cancer diagnosis

Many people get great support from talking to other people who understand what they're going through, either one-to-one or in a group.

### Support groups

Some people find support groups very helpful. Meeting people who understand what it's like to have cancer and sharing advice and experiences can be very helpful.



“ It was reassuring to meet others in a similar situation – and to become friends with them. ”

Some people say they formed bonds with other group members that were meaningful and important. But some people get embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about personal issues with strangers. Our cancer nurses can advise you about the different support groups that are available. There's also a list of groups on our website [www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-support/find-support](http://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-support/find-support)

### Online support

Online communities are groups of people with experience of cancer who can ask and answer questions, share stories and give and receive advice and support on the web. Visit [www.cancer.ie/community](http://www.cancer.ie/community) to join the Irish Cancer Society online community. You can also email one of our cancer nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie) if you have any questions or need support.

### Someone who's been through cancer

We can put you in touch with one of our trained Peer Support volunteers. Our volunteers have all had cancer and really know what you're going through. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 if you would like to find out more.

### Our cancer nurses

If you find it difficult to speak to loved ones, or don't have anyone close you want to talk to, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses in confidence. Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. Our nurses will listen and support you, give you information about your cancer, treatment and side-effects and help you to find support services.

### Counsellors and other professionals

Talking with a trained counsellor in a more focused way can help you to sort out your feelings and find ways to cope with them. This can be very useful, especially if you cannot discuss your feelings and emotions with people close to you. See pages 60-62 for different professionals who can help you.

### Not sure who to talk to?

If you can't think of anyone you would like to talk to, discuss this with your doctor or nurse. There may be counsellors or social workers that can help you identify the most suitable person in your circle. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre if you would like to talk to a cancer nurse in confidence.



## General tips on talking

### Decide what you want to talk about

Quite often you'll find that it's only 2 or 3 things that you really want to discuss.

### Introduce the subject

It's worth introducing the subject, to let your listener know that what you're going to say is something that really matters to you.

Start with something like, 'I think it would be best if I tell you what's going on', 'I want to say a couple of things that are on my mind. Is that OK with you?', 'Can we talk about the way things are at the moment?'

Then you can talk about the specific things that you want to talk about or ask for help with.

### Check the person understands what you're saying

It's a good idea to pause every now and then to check if the other person is following you. You can use any little phrase you like: 'Do you see what I mean?', 'Does that make sense to you?' or 'Are you with me?'

### Check that you have been heard

Towards the end of the conversation try to make sure that what you've said has been heard. If you have asked for some things to be done, for example, it's worth summarising: 'So you'll ask Mary to collect the children on Friday.' After you've covered the main topics, don't feel embarrassed to go back to small talk: 'Let's talk about some little things. I like talking about small things, ordinary things.'

## Talking about your illness



Telling people about your illness is one of the most awkward and difficult aspects of being ill. If the person is your spouse or partner or a close friend, then it's usually possible to have them with you when your doctor talks to you. That way you both hear the information. If a loved one cannot be with you, you may find the following tips useful in telling them what the situation is.

### Think about where to talk

Go somewhere quiet, private and safe to talk. Make sure that you are both comfortable and that you can look at each other's face easily. Many people find it helpful to talk at home, in the car, sitting on a park bench or in a quiet café.

### Find out what your loved one knows

Your loved one may know some of what's been happening. It can be quite useful to ask about that, before you go over ground that has already been covered: 'You probably know some of this already, so why don't you tell me what you make of the situation so far, then I'll take it from there.'

## Opening statement

It often helps to start with an opening statement. For example, if the situation is serious, you can actually say, 'Well, it sounds as if it might be serious'. If the news is worrying but sounds as if it will be all right in the long term, you can say that.

**Small chunks of information** Give the information in small chunks – a few sentences at a time. Ask your friend if they understand what you're saying before you continue. You can use a phrase such as 'Do you see what I mean?', 'Do you follow me?', 'Is this making sense?'

**Silences** There will often be silences. Try not to worry if this happens. You or your friend may well find that just sitting together in the same room seems to say more than any words. If you find that a silence makes you feel uncomfortable, the easiest way to break it is with simple questions such as 'what are you thinking about?'

**Keep to reality** When you tell someone close to you that something serious is wrong with you, they may feel very upset, low and worried, in sympathy with your situation. You may feel that you should put a positive side to the situation to make your loved one feel better. If the facts of your situation support that, of course it's good to do that.

But if you're not sure what's going to happen or your prognosis (what's likely to happen with your illness) is bad, you shouldn't feel that you need to disguise that from your loved one in order not to hurt their feelings. In other words, try to stay as close to the real situation as you can. It may be painful for your loved one at this particular moment, but if you describe the situation as being more positive than it is, your loved one will be much more disappointed (and may even feel hurt) later on.

## Talking about your feelings

You may find that although you want to talk about how you feel, you feel a bit awkward, especially if you're not used to talking about your feelings. This is a normal way to feel.

## Hints and tips: Talking about your feelings

**Try to acknowledge any strong emotion:** If you or your listener are feeling angry or embarrassed or sad, your conversation may feel awkward or you may be so caught up in your own feelings that you don't really hear each other.

Once you acknowledge the emotion, the conversation should be much easier. For example, you could say 'I'm sorry I seem in such a bad mood, but I've just been told that...', 'I'm feeling really frustrated about this', 'You look like you're feeling uneasy when I talk about the cancer', 'This is making us both feel awful'.

**Try to describe your feelings rather than simply display them:** Saying 'I'm feeling really angry today because...' starts a conversation whereas showing your anger by being curt or rude shuts down conversation.

You are perfectly entitled to feel any way you like! Emotions are not right or wrong.

Don't be afraid to tell the other person how much they mean to you. In our daily lives we may not do that often. But when there is a crisis, it's really worthwhile to explain to the other person how you feel about them.

**Don't be afraid to say when you're not sure about something:** If you don't know how you feel or if you don't know what is going to happen or how you are going to cope, you should say so.

**There are times when words aren't needed:** Holding someone's hand, hugging or just sitting together can be enough.

**Don't worry if you start crying:** Crying can release harmful feelings, reduce your stress and make communication easier.

**It's important that you feel you've been heard:** Always give yourself enough time and make sure you are comfortable.

**Humour can be used to help you cope with a stressful situation:** Laughing at something that scares you can help to make it feel less important and threatening. If humour has been part of the way you have coped with fears and difficulties in the past, it may help you now.

## Changing relationships

If you feel that people are treating you differently, try to talk openly to them and find out how they're feeling and if there are any misunderstandings or problems. Tell them how you feel. If you find it hard, you could ask another family member or friend to talk to them.

## Responding to other people's feelings

Even though you're the one facing a cancer diagnosis, you may find it more difficult to deal with other people's emotions than with your own. Your loved ones might be tempted to stay away from you. They may not want to face the fact that they have strong emotions and don't know how to deal with them. Sometimes relatives, especially adolescents, may resent the changes that your illness makes to their lives. Try to acknowledge any strong emotions, which should help make conversations easier.

## Resolving conflict

Facing a cancer diagnosis can leave you and the people around you feeling stressed, angry, worried or nervous. When emotions are high, it can lead to conflict. It might be conflict with your friends or family or with a member of your healthcare team. It's natural to be curt or sharp – sometimes with those closest to you – when you are trying to manage difficult emotions. While it's normal to feel this way, it can leave you and the people around you hurt and isolated.

Try to recognise the feelings behind the conflict. For example, if you're in conflict with your hospital team, it may be because you associate your anger or sadness about having cancer with them.

Once you've identified how you're feeling, try to tell the other person, rather than displaying the feeling: 'I'm feeling really angry about what happened.'

Understand that the other person may have strong emotions too and try and work out how they're feeling.

If there is an issue or an area over which you can't agree, aim to 'agree to disagree' on this issue.

Talk the dispute over with someone else. It is always good to get an outside perspective.





## Talking to your partner

A diagnosis of cancer will have a big effect on both you and your partner. You might find that your relationship changes or feels strained. Trying to deal with all your emotions, as well as trying to support each other, can mean you don't communicate well.

Partners also try to protect each other by not being completely open about their fears and concerns. For example, your partner may not want to express their own feelings, as they may feel you have enough to deal with.

It's important to talk openly with your partner. This can help you to understand each other and may bring you closer together. You do not need to share everything with your partner if you do not want to.

There are tips for talking about your feelings on page 77. Some people find it easier to write down how they're feeling. For example, you might like to write a letter to your partner saying how you feel.

You and your partner will find your own way of dealing with your emotions. If you're struggling, you might benefit from counselling – either together or separately. The Irish Cancer Society funds counselling for people with cancer and their loved ones. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 if you want to find out more.

### Physical intimacy

Cancer or its treatment can affect intimacy and your sex life:

- You may feel too tired to be intimate or have sex.
- You may not want to be intimate or have sex. Dealing with difficult emotions, treatments such as hormone therapies or side-effects such as nausea can all affect your sex drive.
- You may find it hard to relax, if you're feeling anxious or stressed.
- There may be tension between you and your partner if there are unresolved issues between you that are linked to your cancer.

- You may worry about how your partner may react if your body has changed as a result of the cancer or treatment.
- Your partner may be afraid to be intimate with you. They may feel you won't want to be intimate or have sex when you aren't well or they may be afraid of hurting you.

All of these are linked, so if there is a problem in one area, it may have an impact on another. Both you and your partner might withdraw from each other physically and feel shy and awkward. Quite often, sex may stop completely. This may happen at a time when you most need to be reassured and cuddled.

There's more on sexual relationships and coping with sexual side-effects on our website, [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie). You can also get information or advice in confidence from our cancer nurses. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit your local Daffodil Centre. You can also email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

### Hints and tips: Staying close to your partner

- **Even if you don't feel like being intimate or having sex, or can't have sex, it's important to talk to your partner about how you're feeling.** If you don't, they may feel rejected or resentful.
- **Try to stay physically close.** You can still hug, kiss and touch each other.
- **Try to work through any problems once you've talked about them.** For example, if you're self-conscious about your body, you might prefer to keep the lights off when being intimate. If your old ways of being intimate are difficult or painful, try new approaches and other activities.
- **Tell your doctor or nurse if you have side-effects or physical problems** that are making things difficult. They are used to talking about sexual side-effects and can recommend treatments to help.



## Talking to children and teenagers

A cancer diagnosis can affect a whole family. Every family deals with cancer in its own way. You may feel that you don't want your illness to upset family life or change the activities you do with your children. You may feel like you're letting them down. You may also worry about the emotional impact your illness will have on your children. By talking openly, you can answer your children's questions and help them to cope with their emotions.

Our booklet ***Talking to Children about Cancer. A Guide for Parents*** gives practical advice for talking to children about cancer, with specific advice for different age groups. It also has information on supporting children and teenagers and helping them to deal with their emotions. The booklet is available free of charge from Daffodil Centres or by calling the Support Line on 1800 200 700. It's also available to download on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



### Further information and support

If you want more advice and support on talking to your children about cancer, you can ask your nurse or medical social worker. Or call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk to a cancer nurse in confidence.

## Talking about your treatment and care

If you are diagnosed with cancer, it's quite common to feel that you have little or no control over your illness or its treatment. Getting used to the hospital environment and all the medical words can also be a bit overwhelming. It's quite common for people to be confused about their illness or treatment or to lack the confidence to ask the questions they want to. This can leave you feeling powerless, upset, resentful or make it more difficult for you to ask the right questions and to remember the answers.

### Getting the most from your medical team

- **Write a list of questions that you want to ask before you meet the doctor or nurse.** Many people like to have a special notebook that they use for medical appointments. Some like to keep lists or notes on their phone.
- **Mention anything that is on your mind,** even if the doctor doesn't ask.
- **Tell the doctor if you're worried about anything.**
- **Talk about how you're coping emotionally,** especially if you're struggling with worries, low mood or other strong emotions.
- **Try not to be embarrassed – your doctor has seen and heard it all before.** Let your doctor or nurse know if you're feeling embarrassed. Just say 'I'm sorry ... this is embarrassing to talk about', so they can reassure and support you.
- **Give as much information as you can** if the doctor asks you anything.
- **Bring a friend or relative with you.** They can support you, help you to remember what you wanted to ask and may later remember things the doctor said that you have forgotten.
- **Use your own language.** Just because your doctors or nurses use medical language and expressions, it doesn't mean you have to.

There's nothing wrong with using your own words to describe the problem. In fact, using medical terms that you may not fully understand could cause difficulties by giving the wrong message to your doctors.

- **If the doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional uses terms that you don't understand, ask them to explain what they mean.** If you don't ask, they will probably think you've understood.
- **Listen carefully to the answers and take notes.** You can also ask the doctor to write the main things down if you're worried you won't remember. You can ask your doctor if you can record the conversation, using your phone. Most doctors will not object to this.

## Talking about your symptoms

- **It's important to mention any side-effects or symptoms you're having,** so your doctor can find out the cause and find ways to improve them. You're not bothering the doctor. Your quality of life and wellbeing are important.
- **The more information you can give about your symptoms the better,** so write down:
  - What symptoms you're worried about
  - How long you have had them
  - How they feel
  - Have they got worse since you first noticed them?
  - Are the symptoms there all the time or do they come and go?
  - Does anything make your symptoms worse or better?  
For example, exercising, eating certain foods?
  - Have you noticed any other change in your body, even if it's somewhere else, away from your main problem?
- **Don't feel you have to be brave and play down your symptoms.** Equally there's no need to exaggerate symptoms to get the doctor to take you seriously. Be as accurate as you can so they can find the best treatment for you.

## Asking about your treatment

Being prepared with a list of questions can help you to know what to expect and feel more in control. Here are some questions you might like to ask.

- What is this treatment for?
- Why is this the best treatment for me?
- How long will I have treatment for?
- What side-effects should I expect?
- Is there anything I can do to improve side-effects or symptoms?
- Is there a phone number I can call if I feel unwell?
- If I have a problem or feel unwell, when should I go to my GP and when should I contact the hospital?
- I didn't understand what you just said. Could you explain it again please?
- What is this medicine for?
- Can you write down exactly how and when I need to take this medicine?

## Make sure you understand

Sometimes we leave a doctor's appointment wishing we'd asked more questions or got more information. Remember:

- **Take time to ask all your questions** – try not to feel rushed.
- **Ask the doctor to explain again if you don't understand everything.**
- **Repeat back what you have understood:** Perhaps say something like: 'So you're saying that...' or 'if I've got that right, you mean that...' This will help your doctor or nurse to know if they need to explain anything again.
- **Ask for a phone number to call** if you have any further questions.
- **Arrange another appointment if you have unanswered questions or things don't improve.** Go back to the same doctor or get advice from another medical professional.

If you have any worries or unanswered questions between appointments, you can talk to a cancer nurse in confidence by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or by visiting a Daffodil Centre. You can also email the nurses on [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Uncertainty

Being worried about your future is a normal way to feel. Sometimes it can be hard for doctors to predict what will happen or how successful your treatment will be. This can make you feel anxious. You may also worry that the doctor knows what's going to happen but won't tell you. If you are someone who likes information and details, let your doctor know this.

It can be hard to accept uncertainty, especially when it's about something as serious as your health. It may help if you can understand how progress will be measured. You can say, 'So you'll decide from the scan if the treatment is working'. This kind of information may help you to focus on the next step and help you to feel less anxious.

## If you're not happy with your treatment

Sometimes you may not be happy with some aspect of your treatment and care. If this is the case, it is important to express your doubts, as politely as you can. Most doctors and nurses, like all human beings, react to constructive criticism well, and expressing your issues or concerns can be helpful in some situations. If you can be balanced in your criticism, your doctors and nurses are more likely to accept your concerns and do something about them.

A hospital patient liaison officer can also support you if you have any concerns about your care.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Asking about your prognosis



Your prognosis includes information about if and how your cancer is likely to progress, including average survival times or life expectancy.

It's not always easy for doctors to answer a question about life expectancy. Everyone is different, so what happens to you might be quite different from what the doctor expects.

## Should I ask about my prognosis?

If your prognosis is better than expected, you may feel more hopeful about your illness and your future. You may feel more in control by having as much information as possible. Or you may not want to know about your prognosis. You may prefer not to think about the future too much or you may worry how you will cope if you get bad news.

## If you decide you want information on your prognosis

- **Think carefully about how you will cope with the information** before asking for your prognosis.
- **Get information on your prognosis from your doctor.** They know your individual circumstances. Your doctor can also support you in understanding the information and answer any questions you have.
- **Ask a friend or family member to go with you,** if you would like some support.
- **Be careful with online information.** It may be hard to understand or it may even be incorrect. Also, the information may not really apply to your situation or to your particular cancer type. Ask your doctor or nurse specialist for recommended websites.
- **Accept that you will need some time to think about what you have been told.** You may forget some things or there may be things you didn't understand. You may need to talk to your doctor again after you have thought about everything.
- **Get emotional support if you need it.** If you feel upset or anxious about your prognosis you can get support from friends, family or your hospital team. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, visit a Daffodil Centre or email [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie). Our cancer nurses can give you support, information and advice. They can also tell you about free counselling and other services that can help you.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Support resources

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## Money matters

- If you have cancer you may not be able to work for a time. You may also have extra expenses.
- You may have to pay for some of your cancer treatment.
- You might be entitled to certain social welfare payments.
- There are services to help you if you're finding it hard to manage.

A diagnosis of cancer often means that you will have extra expenses, such as car parking during hospital visits, medication, travel, heating and childcare costs. If you can't work or you are unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be harder for you to deal with cancer if you are worried about money.





## Practical and financial solutions from the Irish Cancer Society



We provide individualised financial and practical advice for people living with cancer. This includes:

- **Understanding your welfare entitlements**
- **Advice on accessing extra childcare**
- **Telling your boss about your diagnosis**

We can tell you about the public services, community supports and legal entitlements that might help you and your family.

We can also act as advocates for patients and their families who may need extra support after a diagnosis. This might include having a Practical and Financial Officer present when discussing your diagnosis with your employer or at meetings with your financial provider to help them understand your diagnosis.

To be referred, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Our nurses will chat with you and confirm if a discussion with one of our Practical and Financial Officers might help.

### Medical expenses

Medical expenses that you might have to pay include:

- Visits to your family doctor (GP)
- Visits to hospital
- Medicines
- Medical aids and equipment (appliances), like wigs

How much you pay towards your medical expenses depends on whether or not you qualify for a medical card and what type of health insurance you have, if any.

**If you have a medical card**, you will probably have very little to pay for hospital and GP (family doctor) care or your medication. If you are over 70, you can get a free GP visit card.

Medical cards are usually for people on low incomes, but sometimes a card can be given even if your income is above the limit. For example, if you have a large amount of medical expenses. This is known as a discretionary medical card.

An emergency medical card may be issued if you are terminally ill and in palliative care, irrespective of your income.

**If you don't have a medical card** you will have to pay some of the cost of your care and medication.

**If you have health insurance**, the insurance company will pay some of the costs, but the amount will depend on your insurance plan. It's important to contact your insurance company before starting tests or treatment to check you're covered.

### Benefits and allowances

There are benefits that can help people who are ill and their family. For example, Illness Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Leave.

If you want more information on benefits and allowances, contact:

- **The medical social worker** in the hospital you are attending
- **Citizens Information** – Tel: 0818 074 000
- **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection** – Tel: 0818 662 244 or ask to speak to a DSP representative at your local health centre or DSP office.

Always have your PPS number to hand when you are asking about entitlements and benefits. It's also a good idea to keep a copy of completed forms, so take a photo or photocopy them before posting.

### If you have money problems

If you are getting into debt or you are in debt, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help you. MABS can look at your situation, work out your budget, help you to deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. Call the MABS Helpline 0818 07 2000 for information.

If you are finding it hard to cope financially, contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also give some help towards travel costs in certain cases. See page 99 for more details of our Transport Service and the Travel2Care fund.

You can also call our Support Line 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre and the nurse will suggest ways to help you manage.

## Money and finances

Go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and see our **Managing money** page for information on:

- Medical costs and help available
- Benefits and allowances that you or your family may qualify for
- Travel services
- Ways to cope with the cost of cancer

Our Benefits Hub on our website has lots of information on government supports for people who are unwell and their carers. It also has advice on how to apply.



## Irish Cancer Society services

Our Cancer Support Department provides a range of cancer support services for people with cancer, at home and in hospital, including:

- Support Line
- Daffodil Centres
- Telephone Interpreting Service
- Peer Support
- Patient Education
- Counselling
- Transport Service
- Night Nursing
- Publications and website information
- Support in your area
- Practical and financial solutions (see page 92)

## Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Call our Support Line and speak to one of our cancer nurses for confidential advice, support and information for anyone affected by cancer. Our Support Line is open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm or visit our Online Community at [www.cancer.ie/community](http://www.cancer.ie/community)

The Support Line also offers video calls for those who want a face-to-face chat with one of our cancer nurses. From the comfort of your own home, you can meet a cancer nurse online and receive confidential advice, support and information on any aspect of cancer.

Our cancer nurses are available Monday to Friday to take video calls on the Microsoft Teams platform. To avail of the service, visit <https://www.cancer.ie/Support-Line-Video-Form>

One of our nursing team will then email you with the time for your video call. The email will also have instructions on how to use Microsoft Teams on your phone, tablet or computer.



## Daffodil Centres

Visit our Daffodil Centres, located in 13 hospitals nationwide. The centres are staffed by cancer nurses and trained volunteers who provide face-to-face advice, support and information to anyone affected by cancer.

The service is free and confidential.

This is a walk-in service; you do not need an appointment. For the opening hours and contact details of your nearest Daffodil Centre, go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and search 'Daffodil Centres'.



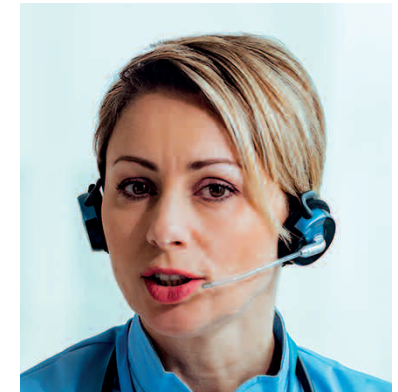
### Who can use the Daffodil Centres?

Daffodil Centres are open to everyone. Just call in if you want to talk or need information on any aspect of cancer including:

- Cancer treatments and side-effects
- Chemotherapy group education sessions
- Emotional support
- Practical entitlements and services
- Living with and beyond cancer
- End-of-life services
- Lifestyle and cancer prevention
- Local cancer support groups and centres

## Telephone Interpreting Service

We make every effort to ensure that you can speak to our Support Line and Daffodil Centre nurses in your own language through our Telephone Interpreting Service.



If you would like to speak to us using the Telephone Interpreting Service, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700, Monday to Friday 9am-5pm, or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

- Tell us, in English, the language you would like.
- You will be put on hold while we connect with an interpreter. You may be on hold for a few minutes. Don't worry, we will come back to you.
- We will connect you to an interpreter.
- The interpreter will help you to speak to us in your own language.

## Peer Support

Peer Support is a free and confidential telephone service connecting people with similar cancer experiences. Peer Support volunteers are fully trained to provide emotional and practical cancer support in a safe, responsible and kind way.

To be referred to a Peer Support volunteer, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

For more information on Peer Support, search 'peer support' at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## Patient Education

At our free patient education workshops, our cancer nurses provide tailored information before and after cancer treatment.

The workshops take place in person, in one of our 13 Daffodil Centres nationwide, or online. To register for a place at one of our Patient Education Workshops, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, contact your nearest Daffodil Centre or email [patienteducation@irishcancer.ie](mailto:patienteducation@irishcancer.ie)



## Counselling

We fund professional one-to-one counselling for those who have been affected by a cancer diagnosis. Counselling is available for the person who has been diagnosed, family members and close friends. The services we provide are:

- **Remote counselling nationwide**, by telephone or video call.
- **In-person counselling sessions in cancer support centres** around the country.

For more information, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700, or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

## Support in your area

We work with local cancer support centres and the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) to ensure cancer patients and their families have access to high-quality, confidential support in a location that's convenient to them.

For more information about what's available near you, visit [www.cancer.ie/local-support](http://www.cancer.ie/local-support), call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

## Transport Service

We provide patient travel and financial grants for patients in need who are in cancer treatment.

- Transport is available to patients having chemotherapy treatments in our partner hospitals who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments.
- We have recently opened a pilot service for patients having radiotherapy treatment at University Hospital Cork and Bons Secours Hospital, Cork.
- **Travel2Care** is a fund for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from their diagnostic test appointments or cancer treatments. Patients can apply for this fund if they are travelling over 50 kilometres one way to a national designated cancer centre or satellite centre. Travel2Care is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme.

To access any of these supports, please contact your hospital healthcare professional, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.



## Night Nursing

We provide end-of-life care for cancer patients in their own homes. We offer up to 10 nights of care for each patient. Our service allows patients to remain at home for the last days of their lives surrounded by their families and loved ones. This is a unique service in Ireland, providing night-time palliative nursing care to cancer patients, mostly between 11pm and 7am.

For more information, please contact the healthcare professional looking after your loved one.

“ We were really lost when we brought Mammy home from the hospital and the night nurse's support was invaluable. She provided such practical and emotional support. ”

“ Our night nurse was so caring and yet totally professional. We are so grateful to her for being there for Dad and for us. ”

## Publications and website information

We provide information on a range of topics, including cancer types, treatments and side-effects and coping with cancer. Visit our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) to see our full range of information and download copies. You can also Freephone our Support Line or call into your nearest Daffodil Centre for a free copy of any of our publications.

To find out more about the Irish Cancer Society's services and programmes:

- Visit us at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)
- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Email our Support Line at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre
- Follow us on:
  - Facebook
  - X
  - Instagram
  - LinkedIn





## Local cancer support services

The Irish Cancer Society works with cancer support services all over Ireland. They have a range of services for cancer patients, their partners, families and carers, during and after treatment, many of which are free. For example:

- **Professional counselling.** The Irish Cancer Society funds free one-to-one counselling remotely and through many local support services
- **Support groups,** often led by professionals like social workers, counsellors, psychologists or cancer nurses
- **Special exercise programmes**
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques,** such as mindfulness and meditation
- **Complementary therapies** like massage, reflexology and acupuncture
- **Specialist services** such as prosthesis or wig fitting and lymphoedema services, such as education, exercise, self-management and manual lymph drainage
- **Mind and body sessions,** for example, yoga and tai chi
- **Expressive therapies** such as creative writing and art
- **Free Irish Cancer Society publications** and other high-quality, trustworthy information on a range of topics

Cancer support services usually have a drop-in service where you can call in for a cup of tea and find out what's available.

You can call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 to find your nearest cancer support centre. Or go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and search 'Find support'.



## Questions to ask your doctor

Here is a list of questions people often want to ask. There is also some space for you to write down your own questions if you wish. Do ask questions – it is always better to ask than to worry.

How am I likely to feel throughout my illness?

---

What can I do to cope?

---

Is there someone I can talk to about my fears and concerns?

---

What are my chances of getting anxiety or depression?

---

How can I deal with depression if it occurs?

---

How can I cope with the changes in my body as a result of cancer?

---

Are there any support groups available?

---

Is there anyone that I can speak to about my spiritual or religious needs?

---

Can someone help me talk to other members of my family about what is happening to me?

---

What support is available for other people in my family, such as my partner, carer or children?

---

## Deciding who to talk to

Type of support	Names (fill in)
People who make me feel good about myself	
People who help me to cheer up	
People who help me to feel positive about my future	
People I can talk to about my physical symptoms	
People I can talk to about my emotions	
People I can talk to when I'm frightened	
People I can cry with	
People I can rely on in a crisis	
People I can be quiet with	
People who are good listeners	
People I can be totally myself with	
People who give me honest criticism when I need it	

Type of support	Names (fill in)
People who help me to see all sides of a situation when I'm making a decision	
People who have the same interests and hobbies as me	
People I can reminisce with	
People I can talk to about spiritual matters	
People who give me sound advice about legal matters	
People who give me sound advice about financial matters	
People who give me sound advice about insurance matters	
People who give me sound advice about employment matters	
People who are frank with me about my illness	
People who give me explanations about my illness and treatment	
People who are coping well with cancer	
People who benefit from talking to me	



## Join the Irish Cancer Society team

If you want to make a difference to people affected by cancer, join our team!

### Support people affected by cancer

Reaching out directly to people with cancer is one of the most rewarding ways to help:

- Help people needing lifts to hospital by becoming a volunteer driver
- Give one-on-one support to someone newly diagnosed with cancer as part of our Peer Support programme
- Give information and support to people concerned about or affected by cancer at one of our hospital-based Daffodil Centres

### Share your experiences

Use your voice to bring reassurance to cancer patients and their families, help people to connect with our services or inspire them to get involved as a volunteer:

- Share your cancer story
- Tell people about our services
- Describe what it's like to organise or take part in a fundraising event

### Raise money

All our services are funded by the public's generosity:

- Donate direct
- Take part in one of our fundraising events or challenges
- Organise your own event

Contact our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 if you want to get involved!

### Did you like this booklet?

We would love to hear your comments or suggestions. Please email [reviewers@irishcancer.ie](mailto:reviewers@irishcancer.ie)



Our cancer nurses are here for you:

- Support Line Freephone **1800 200 700**
- Email **[supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)**
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre