

Sadness or depression

When you have cancer, you may feel sad at times. This may be at diagnosis, or during or after treatment. This feeling may come and go depending on what is happening at the time. This is a normal reaction. For most people, feelings of sadness might lessen or go away. But for some people, a low mood may continue or get worse.

When a low mood persists for weeks or months, it can be a sign of depression. Depression is common and can be caused by different things. It might be because of cancer or other things happening in your life. It might be caused by a combination of both. Some cancer treatments can affect your mood.

It can be difficult to know whether you are [depressed](#). Sometimes other people notice your symptoms and suggest that you [might need help](#). Symptoms of depression can be physical or psychological. They can also affect how you feel around other people (social). Symptoms of depression can include:

- feeling low or sad most of the time
- feeling hopeless and helpless, anxious or worried
- finding it difficult to make decisions
- not getting any enjoyment out of life
- having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- physical changes such as moving or speaking more slowly than usual, changes in appetite or weight, unexplained aches and pains, a lack of energy, a low sex drive (loss of libido) or sleep problems.
- avoiding contact with friends, taking part in fewer social activities or losing interest in hobbies.

Tips for coping with sadness or depression

It is important to remember that depression is common and that there are things that can help. There are many ways to cope and different types of support. The first step to feeling better is getting help.

- It is normal to have some of these feelings at times. But if they go on for more than a couple of weeks, talk to your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse.
- If you are sad or depressed, it may help to be kind and gentle to yourself and make sure you [get enough sleep, eat well and keep active](#). You could also try getting outdoors, doing things you enjoy and being with people you like.
- If you find it hard to make the effort, try to do one small thing at a time and celebrate your successes.
- Many people get support by talking to family members, friends, a support group or online community.
- Talking one-to-one with a trained counsellor can help you sort out your feelings. Your GP can give you details and make a referral.
- If you think you might have depression, speak to your GP. They can talk to you about your feelings and help you find ways to cope. They may suggest ways of managing the depression including counselling, medication or a combination of both. They may put you in touch with local exercise schemes.
- If you are frightened by your feelings and emotions, or if you are becoming very depressed, you can get help from a healthcare professional. This could be from your hospital healthcare team, your GP, a mental health professional, a local charity or organisations such as Macmillan.
- If you have any thoughts about self-harm or suicide, you should contact your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse straight away. If you cannot contact anyone or get help, call **999** or go to your local Accident and Emergency department (A&E). Samaritans has a 24-hour confidential helpline that provides support. Call **116 123**.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Talking about cancer](#)
- [Your feelings after cancer treatment](#)
- [Your feelings and cancer – easy read.](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line. Through Bupa, Macmillan is offering up to 6 free counselling sessions for adults struggling emotionally because they are living with cancer. You can find out more about the [Bupa service](#) by contacting us free on **0808 808 00 00**.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat to us online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy – visit www.bacp.co.uk
- Mind – visit www.mind.org.uk
- UK Council for Psychotherapy – visit www.psychotherapy.org.uk.

Notes and questions
