Cancer-Related Depression

Those diagnosed with cancer are at higher risk for experiencing depression.

What Is Depression?
Being diagnosed with cancer is a stressful, life-changing event that can evoke feelings of fear, worry, sadness, and anger. Depression gives one feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, disinterest in previously enjoyable activities, and a consistently down and sad mood. Depression often interferes with one's ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy life. Patients with cancer are especially at risk for depression because of the physical changes and limitations from symptoms and treatment as well as of the uncertainty their treatment holds on their lives.

What Can Patients Do to Alleviate Depression?
Mental health is just as important as a healthy body. Caring for oneself at a time of cancer treatment may be difficult. Below are some recommended tools to make this easier.

Nontherapeutic Tools
- Physical activity has positive effects on both mood and the body and can greatly reduce stress. Any level of physical activity can be beneficial to your emotional and mental health.
- A balanced diet can also help improve your mood and reduce stress. A nutritionist can help with establishing a healthy diet during treatment.
- Maintaining a healthy support network with friends and family can help you cope with cancer-related life changes.

Therapeutic Treatment
- Medication prescribed by a doctor can be used to manage depression symptoms.
- Support groups, led by a social worker, clinical therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist, can be helpful when coping with cancer-related depression.
- Individual therapy is another great tool to help overcome depression. Private sessions with a social worker, clinical therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist can help treat cancer-related depression.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a type of therapy that helps patients identify and manage emotions and thoughts. Cognitive-behavioral therapy has been proven effective in managing depression.

Treatments for cancer-related depression

Nontherapeutic tools
- Physical activity
- Healthy diet
- Friend and family support

Therapeutic treatments
- Medication
- Individual therapy (including cognitive-behavioral therapy)
- Support groups

FOR MORE INFORMATION
NIH National Institution of Mental Health

Emotional Side Effects of Cancer, and When to Call a Doctor

Good places to start searching for a mental health professional include asking your treating oncologist for a referral, checking the PsychologyToday.com website for local providers in your area, and checking your insurance policy website.

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