

Cancer-Related Distress: What Is It and What Can Help

Distress can have many meanings. Many people with cancer have distress at some point in time.

Distress is an unpleasant experience of mental, physical, social, or spiritual in nature. It can affect the way you think, feel, or act. Distress may make it harder to cope with having cancer, its symptoms or its treatment. If you are distressed, you may feel:



Some distress is normal. You may feel distressed when you learn you have cancer. It is also normal to worry at certain times, especially when starting treatment, waiting for surgery and receiving test results. For some, distress remains after treatment is over.

There are signs that can warn you that your level of distress is too high. Some of these are:

- Feeling more overwhelmed than usual
- Feeling more tired and fatigued
- More physical symptoms on the days you feel stressed (getting headaches, body aches)
- Being more irritable, or angry than usual
- Trouble getting to sleep or waking early (getting less than 4 hours of sleep)
- Having a very hard time making decisions, even little ones
- Questioning spiritual beliefs that once gave you comfort
- Feeling worthless and useless

Tips to Help You Cope With Distress

- Rely on ways of coping that have helped you solve problems in the past.
- Use your support systems – share your worries or symptoms with people closest to you.
- Work together with your healthcare team to make decisions about your care and treatment.
- Deal with cancer one day at a time. On the really tough days, it might be one hour at a time.
- Join support and self-help groups.
- Keep a personal journal as a way to express yourself.
- Be physically active (exercise, go to work, get outside). Talk with your healthcare team about an exercise plan.
- Seek help if the low periods are frequent or severe, it's okay to have a bad day.
- Accept help from a mental health expert.
- Have your support person available during your appointment, by phone or in-person, when permitted.

- Talk to a social worker who can help to provide support, education, and additional resources.
- Remember, you are not alone. There are more than 16.9 million cancer survivors today!

If you are experiencing any symptoms of distress, reach out to the social work department at 732-235-6792, during business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.).

Some assistance and additional resources can be accessed by calling 211.

If you are in need of medical assistance, or have any medical concerns, please call 732-235-2465.

If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call 732-235-2465 and select the option that best meets your needs.