Understanding

The Emotional Effects of Cancer

A guide for patients with cancer
Understanding

The Emotional Effects of Cancer

This booklet has been written to help you understand about the emotional effects of cancer. It has been prepared and checked by medical doctors, other relevant specialists, nurses and patients. The information in this booklet is an agreed view on the emotional effects of cancer, how they are managed and ways of coping. If you are a patient, your doctor or nurse may go through the booklet with you and mark sections that are important for you. You can also make a note below of contact names and information that you may need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialist nurse</th>
<th>Tel:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical social worker</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family doctor</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical oncologist</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatments</td>
<td>Review dates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you like, you can also add:

Your name
Address
This booklet has been produced by Nursing Services in the Irish Cancer Society to meet the need for improved communication, information and support for cancer patients and their families throughout diagnosis and treatment. We would like to thank all those patients, families and professionals whose support and advice made this publication possible.

MEDICAL ADVISERS
Dr Anne Marie O’Dwyer, Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist
Dr Eugene Cassidy, Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist
Dr Sonya Collier, Clinical Psychologist
Dr Shawn Steggels, Clinical Psychologist
Irish Oncology and Haematology Social Workers Group

CONTRIBUTORS
Ciara Lily, Cancer Information Service Nurse
Alison Wills, Cancer Information Service Nurse

EDITOR
Tara Droog

SERIES EDITOR
Joan Kelly

The following sources were used in the publication of this booklet:


Published by the Irish Cancer Society.

Next revision: 2017

Product or brand names that appear in this book are for example only. The Irish Cancer Society does not endorse any specific product or brand.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Irish Cancer Society.

ISBN 0953236901

Contents
4 Introduction

Emotional effects of cancer
5 How might I react to a cancer diagnosis?
6 Shock and disbelief
7 Fear and uncertainty
8 Loss of control
9 Sadness and sorrow
9 Denial
10 Anger
10 Resentment
11 Blame and guilt
11 Withdrawal and isolation

Feeling distressed
13 Anxiety
15 Depression

How to cope
23 How can I cope with physical effects?
28 How can I help myself?
39 What if I need professional help?
44 Can complementary therapies help me?
47 Can spirituality and religion help me?
49 How can I support my family?
49 How can my family and friends help?
50 How can I talk to my children?

Support resources
53 Who else can help?
55 Irish Cancer Society services
59 Useful organisations
65 Helpful books
66 Questions to ask your doctor
67 Your own questions
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Introduction

This booklet has been written to help you understand more about the emotional effects of cancer. The information covers various kinds of emotional effects, in particular anxiety and depression, and ways to help you deal with them.

By reading this booklet, you may learn what emotions to expect and, if you are finding it difficult to cope, to seek professional help at an early stage. We hope it answers some questions you may have. However, you are likely to have some questions and concerns of your own that this booklet does not answer. It is best to discuss these with your doctor and nurse.

At the end of the booklet you will find a list of useful books. There is also a list of websites and special groups to help and support you at this time.

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 a section and when you feel relaxed and want to know more, read another section. Some of the information may not be relevant to your situation.

If you do not understand something that has been written, discuss it with your doctor or nurse. You can also call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700. It is open Monday to Thursday 9am–7pm and Friday 9am–5pm. If you prefer, you can also visit a Daffodil Centre if one is available in your hospital. See page 56 for more about Daffodil Centres.

National Cancer Helpline Freephone 1800 200 700

Emotional effects of cancer

People have many views on cancer that can affect how they react to a cancer diagnosis. Many cancers are now curable and most can be controlled, but some people still associate it with pain, indignity and loss of control. Indeed hearing the word cancer may feel like a death sentence at first. But often the fears can be worse than the reality. The idea of side-effects during treatment can give rise to worries too, even though they can be well controlled nowadays.

It is normal to be upset when told you have cancer.

It is normal to be upset when told you have cancer. You are also likely to experience a range of emotions throughout your diagnosis, treatment and recovery. From shock to anger, all these feelings are normal and to be expected. It does not mean that you are not coping. By recognising the feelings and emotions you are having, you can learn to cope better. It will also make you feel more in control of your illness. Though it can take a while to come to terms with your emotions, it will happen in time.

How might I react to a cancer diagnosis?

There are many reactions to being told you have cancer. Reactions often differ from person to person. In fact, there is no right or wrong way to feel. There is also no set time to have one particular emotion or not. Some reactions may occur at the time of diagnosis, while others might appear or reappear later during your treatment. Or you may have a delayed emotional reaction to your cancer when you are adjusting to life after treatment.

Some of the more common reactions include:

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear and uncertainty
- Loss of control
- Sorrow and sadness
- Denial
- Anger
- Resentment
- Blame and guilt
- Withdrawal and isolation
Sometimes a cancer diagnosis can bring greater distress and cause:
- Anxiety
- Depression

Each person may experience some or all of these feelings, and each will handle it differently. Some days you may feel better than other days. As time goes on you will adjust to living with cancer, and it may even surprise you how well you’ve coped during your treatment. Your family and friends will also need time to get used to the diagnosis.

Sometimes you may experience very strong emotions that may leave you feeling vulnerable and at a loss what to do. Knowing when to seek professional help is therefore important. If you develop anxiety and depression, it is best to seek help early.

Shock and disbelief

Shock is often the first reaction to a cancer diagnosis. In fact, you may feel numb and the situation may seem ‘unreal’. Many people think cancer will never happen to them and are genuinely shocked when it does. Because it can be hard to believe, you may think at first that the doctors have made a mistake. Hearing that you have a serious illness can also make you realise that you are not superhuman but mortal after all.

Even if your doctors and nurses give you lots of information, the news may not sink in for a while. You may find yourself confused, asking the same questions over and over again. At times you may not know whom to trust. Or else you may accept the news very calmly and say nothing. Because you don’t really believe what is happening, you may not want to talk about your illness, especially to your family and close friends. These are all common reactions to a cancer diagnosis.

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

Fear and uncertainty

‘Am I going to die?’ ‘Will I be in pain?’ ‘Will I change?’

There is no doubt that cancer is a scary word. You may have many fears when first told of your diagnosis, such as:
- Fear of dying
- Fear of pain
- Fear of rejection

For most people when told they have cancer, the first thing they think about is dying. They think the worst. But nowadays many cancers can be cured. When a cure is not possible, cancer can be controlled for a number of years with modern treatments. New treatments are also being developed all the time.

One of the greatest fears about cancer is pain. The fear of pain and pain itself can overwhelm everything else. However, some cancers cause no physical pain at all. Nowadays if you do get pain, it can be controlled with very effective painkillers. Other methods of pain relief can include radiotherapy and nerve blocks.

You may also have fears that your experience of cancer will change who you are and that people will reject or avoid you. For example, after some cancer treatments your body image may be different, and it will take some time for you and for others to adjust to your new look.

You may also have practical worries and fears such as:
- Financial: What will happen if I have less income or no income? How will I pay for medical bills?
- Job: Will I be able to hold onto my job? Will I lose important work contacts?
- 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?

It is natural for you to be afraid or be concerned about the future.
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Sometimes your doctor may find it hard to predict the outcome of your treatment. As a result, living with 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.

One of the best ways to overcome your fears is to learn more about your illness and its treatment. It will help you feel more confident. The real facts about cancer and its treatment are not as scary as you might think. 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 are likely to be worried too.

Sadness and sorrow

It is natural to feel sad when told you have cancer. You may feel sad for a variety of reasons: for the loss of your good health, for the plans that are put on hold, for any changes to your body that arise from treatment. Depending on your type of cancer, your fertility or body image may be affected by treatment. Then the sadness or sorrow can come from feeling as if a part of you has died. It may not be there all the time and may come and go, but it will gradually fade.

Denial

Sometimes after being told their diagnosis, people deny they have cancer. While this may seem unusual, it is a valid way of coping. As a result, people may not wish to mention or discuss their illness. Or else they may talk as if their illness is nothing serious.

One of the best ways to overcome these fears is to learn more about your illness and its treatment. It will help you feel more confident. The real facts about cancer and its treatment are not as scary as you might think. 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 are likely to be worried too.

Loss of control

Following a cancer diagnosis, it is common for people to feel their life is beyond their control. Before your diagnosis, your life may have stretched ahead full of promise, whereas now the years feel squeezed together and shortened. Your life is put on hold. You may even lose some independence and freedom.

Because you don’t know enough about your illness at first, you may rely totally on the advice of your doctors and nurses. You may not feel confident to make any decisions about your treatment. When you experience a loss of control it can lead to feelings of helplessness. You may also think that you will be unable to cope with your treatment or that you will ‘fall to pieces’ or ‘go crazy’. You may even lose hope.

It takes a while to know what is within your control and what is beyond it. Finding out as much as possible about your illness can help you gain some control. Taking an active part in the decision-making of treatment can help you to take back some control over what is happening.

Learning more about your illness and treatment can help overcome your fears.

‘I can’t cope with this.’
‘I’ll never get through it.’

‘I used to be so healthy.’
‘I had so many plans.’

‘There’s nothing really wrong with me.’
‘I haven’t got cancer.’

‘There’s nothing really wrong with me.’
‘I haven’t got cancer.’

Do talk to your doctor, nurse or medical social worker about these feelings. Joining a support group or visiting a support centre can help to ease these fears and emotions.

National Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 200 700
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

**Blame and guilt**

When diagnosed with a serious illness such as cancer, it is natural to want to know the causes. This is because we feel better or in control if we know why something has happened. People start to look at their diet, lifestyle, work practices, environment or family history in search of a reason. As a result people sometimes blame themselves or others for their illness. Or else they wonder why it should have happened to them. As doctors rarely know exactly what has caused cancer, there is no reason for you to blame yourself.

Other times, people feel guilty because they delayed going to the doctor with their symptoms, fearing the worst. No matter what the reason, don’t torture yourself at this time. Regret serves no useful purpose. Instead 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 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. It is normal for you to want to be alone to sort out your thoughts and feelings. You will want to take stock of things and work out how best you can cope.

However, it is not a good idea to spend long hours on your own every day. Sometimes depression can make you avoid family and friends and stop you wanting to talk. See page 15 for more details on depression. If you isolate yourself, it can be hard for your family and friends, as they will want to share this difficult time with you. They may worry about you needlessly. Let your family and friends know that you will talk to them once you are ready.

**Anger**

It is also normal to be very upset when told you have cancer. Many aspects of your illness can result in anger and distress. Anger can often hide feelings such as fear or sadness. You may feel angry towards the doctors and nurses who are caring for you. Or if you have a religious belief, you may feel angry with God for allowing cancer to occur. You may vent your anger on those closest to you. Indeed being unable to protect the ones you love may frustrate 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. So if it persists and you are finding it hard to talk to your family, tell your nurse or doctor.

**Resentment**

It is understandable that you might be resentful and unhappy because you have cancer, while other people are well. During the course of your illness and treatment similar feelings of resentment may occur for many reasons. For example, another patient receiving the same treatment as you may respond quicker than you do. Sometimes too relatives, especially adolescents, can resent the changes that your illness makes to their lives. It is 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.
If you would like more information on how to talk about your cancer, there is a booklet available called *Who Can Ever Understand?: Talking about Your Cancer*. If you would like a copy, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre, if one is available in your hospital.

**Positive emotions**

A cancer experience can also bring positive emotions. However, it may be some time before you are ready to accept these emotions as positive. You may experience great love, affection and closeness by those around you, not only 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 strength lies and what is important in life for you. You may also get the chance to do and enjoy different things that you would never have done otherwise.

**Living well after cancer**

Surviving cancer brings its own issues too. Once your treatment is over and you have survived cancer, you may have other fears and emotions. For example:

- You may feel isolated and afraid when you are no longer attending hospital, except for follow-up visits. It can feel like you are on your own because your doctors and nurses are no longer there to support and protect you.
- Healing your mind is also a part of recovering from cancer. This may take some time.
- It is natural to be afraid the cancer will come back. As a result, you might worry about every ache or pain, thinking the cancer has come back. Gradually these fears will fade and go away.
- You may feel depressed or anxious and have ongoing feelings of sadness and anger.

Do talk to your doctor, nurse or medical social worker about these feelings. Joining a support group or visiting a support centre can help to ease these fears and emotions.

---

**Feeling distressed**

### Anxiety

When first diagnosed with cancer it is normal to feel anxious and worried about what will happen. Sometimes too after treatment has finished you may feel anxious that your cancer will recur. Anxiety is a natural response to a stressful situation, such as cancer in your case. It is an unpleasant feeling and can range from unease to intense dread.

Anxiety can be constant or it may come and go. Sometimes it may get worse and you may feel unable to cope. You may find it hard to concentrate and get distracted or upset easily. When it interferes with your quality of life and makes doing everyday things hard, you should seek help.

Anxiety can affect your body in many ways. It can have physical effects, psychological effects and affect your behaviour too.

#### Physical effects

Fear and anxiety can give rise to many physical effects. Sometimes when anxiety is severe it can lead to ‘panic attacks’. Panic attacks are brief episodes of intense anxiety. 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
- Overbreathing (hyperventilating)
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Hot flushes
- Racing heartbeat (palpitations)
- Chest pain
- Pins and needles
- Tense muscles, like a knot in your stomach

---

National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Avoidance is one of the most common reactions to anxiety. You may find that you delay attending the hospital for tests because you fear the results. Or else you might make excuses to avoid going out with your family and friends. In fact, your social life may become limited because of your avoidance behaviour.

Coping with anxiety

There are many ways to help you cope with anxiety. A combination of talking, getting information, relaxing, doing things to make you feel good, and possibly medication, will help you. If anxiety is making your life miserable, talk to your doctor, nurse or medical social worker for advice. See page 28 for more information on ways to manage anxiety.

If you have financial worries that are causing anxiety, contact the medical social worker in your hospital or community welfare officer.

Psychological effects

The psychological effects of anxiety involve what you think, feel and say to yourself when you are anxious. Often you may experience the following:

- Fear and dread
- Worry
- Negative thoughts
- The same feelings over and over again

Some people get confused and mixed-up when anxious and later cannot remember what they felt. If you do experience an anxiety attack, 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 make us behave or act in a certain way. If you are deeply anxious, you may be:

- Irritable with others
- Moody
- Nervous
- Tearful
- Angry
- Avoiding people and places

Depression

It is natural to feel some sadness during and after your illness. At times you may feel low and not your usual self. You may even feel ‘slowed up’ and empty. But usually people or events will cheer you up. However, if nothing cheers you up and you are feeling low for several weeks, it may be a sign that you are depressed. 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 rather hopeless.

You may feel low because of the change to your usual routine or at the side-effects of treatment, such as hair loss and tiredness or perhaps the
risk of infertility. Also, you can be upset if your cancer is taking a long
time to respond to treatment. Other times, you may feel nothing or just
numb. For some people, the hardest time is when treatment has
finished and things are getting back to normal. An end to your hospital
visits may make you feel alone and neglected. It is important to
remember that recovery time varies between people. You may feel that
during this time you need greater support.

The reality of depression
Depression is more than just feeling sad or blue. It is a significant
medical condition that affects thoughts, feelings, and the ability to
function in everyday life. It can occur at any age and is more common
than you might think. Depression affects one in five people at some
point in their lives. In this illness, recovery takes time. And because
depression affects in five people at some
point in their lives. In this illness, recovery takes time. And because
people do not cause their depression in the first place, they cannot just
‘pull themselves together’ or ‘snap out of it’. Having depression does
not mean that you are a failure either.

One of the many myths about people with cancer is that they are
depressed. This is not true. Neither is it true that depression in a
person with cancer is normal. And it is not true to say that treatments
for depression in people with cancer are not helpful.

Cause of depression
The exact cause of depression is unknown. However, some people have
a higher risk of developing it. A person’s chance of developing
depression depends on a number of factors. These include experiencing
a life stress, the ability to cope with it and being vulnerable.

A person with cancer can be vulnerable if they have any of the
following:
- Past history of depression
- Past history of psychological problems, for example, alcohol or drug
  addiction
- Family history of depression
- Having a stress- or anxiety-prone personality
- Lack of a social support network – no family to rely on
- Not having someone to confide in

Other factors include:
- Stress from life events – moving house, marriage, divorce, job loss,
bereavement, other major illness, etc.

Stress linked to cancer can include:
- Advanced stage of cancer
- Poorly controlled pain
- Increased physical disability
- Certain types of cancers
- Some chemotherapy or other drug treatments

Diagnosing depression
Diagnosing depression in someone with cancer is not easy. It can
often be hard to separate the signs of depression from the side-effects
of treatment. This is because some signs of depression are non-
specific, such as tiredness, loss of interest and appetite, which can
occur as a result of treatment too. But it is important to recognise the
signs early so that you can be treated. If you are feeling low for more
than 2 weeks, you should seek help. Talk to your doctor or nurse if
you think you are showing signs of depression.

Signs of depression
- A low mood 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
- Feeling worse in the mornings
- Changed sleeping pattern
  – problems getting to sleep or
  waking early
- Poor concentration and
  forgetfulness
- Feelings of guilt or blame
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Feeling oversensitive or
  vulnerable
- Feelings of despair
- Feeling worthless
- Feeling irritable
- Wanting to cry or crying
- Thoughts of suicide
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Physical symptoms
- Lack of energy or fatigue
- Loss of appetite or increased appetite – weight loss or gain
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Loss of interest in sex

Dealing with depression
It is important to remember that depression can be successfully treated. So there is no need to feel you are not coping if you ask for help. You should not feel guilty either if you are not ‘fighting’ cancer because your energy is low. There are some things you can do by yourself first called self-help strategies, which may help you feel in control and improve your self-esteem. See page 28 for more details.

If you feel that your low moods are getting the better of you, talk to someone close to you who is a good listener. It is not always easy to talk about emotional problems. Often they can be hard to share with loved ones. If you feel comfortable discussing personal worries with your doctor or nurse, they may be able to help you. Talking to a counsellor or psychotherapist, who is not personally involved in your situation, can be a great help too. They can help you to make sense of your thoughts, feelings and ideas. Many cancer support services have a counsellor available to talk to you. See page 60 for a list of support services. You can also call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700, drop into a Daffodil Centre or visit www.cancer.ie/how-we-can-help for more advice.

Antidepressant therapy
Sometimes there may be no signs that your mood is improving. If you are finding it difficult to get over a period of depression, your doctor may suggest a treatment. Often a course of antidepressant drugs lasting 6 months can be helpful. These drugs affect the levels of important chemicals in your brain so that they can lift your spirits.

Antidepressants work slowly, so it may take at least 2 weeks before you notice any improvement. Over the next 3 to 4 weeks the benefits will build up. It is important to stick with the drug for a while before stopping or changing it. If the drug does not agree with you, your doctor may have to try other drugs to find one that suits you best. Your doctor will advise you to continue taking the medication until you have been back to your usual self for at least 3 months or sometimes longer. When you start to feel better and no longer need them, your doctor will reduce the dose and stop the drug gradually. If you stop too soon, it increases the chance of the depression returning. Also, don’t stop your treatment suddenly as you may feel physically unwell. Some antidepressants stay in your body for a while and need to be gradually reduced.

In general, antidepressants are not addictive, so it’s unlikely that you will become addicted to them. Most people only need to take them for at least 4 to 6 months.

Antidepressants are not addictive.

Like all medicines antidepressants do have side-effects. However, these are usually mild and tend to be a problem only during the first few weeks of treatment. The most common side-effects are:
- Feelings of sickness (nausea)
- Sleeplessness
- Headaches
- Constipation
- Sexual problems
- A dry mouth

If these side-effects are upsetting you, do tell your doctor. He or she 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.

Herbal remedies
Some herbal remedies may be helpful. In recent years St John’s Wort has been promoted as a treatment for mild depression. However, before you decide to use any herbal remedies, you should discuss it with your doctor. St John’s Wort can have harmful interactions with some medications and is now only available on prescription.

Referral to a psychiatrist
Some doctors treat depression themselves while others may prefer to refer you to a psychiatrist. If you are referred to a psychiatrist, it does...
not mean that your doctor thinks you’re going mad or incapable of helping yourself. A psychiatrist has special expertise in helping people who are depressed. On your first visit, the psychiatrist will ask you questions about how the depression developed, how it is affecting you, and the treatments you have tried. Once the psychiatrist has a picture of your depression, he or she can suggest other treatments.

There is no set number of times that you should visit the psychiatrist. You may need to go several times or only once. After your first visit, the psychiatrist may think that a talking therapy is the best treatment for you. He or she may advise you to see a counsellor, clinical psychologist or psychotherapist. See page 39 for more details about professional help.

Remember that you will 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. However, depression does not last forever. Even with no treatment, your mood will eventually improve, but it may take much longer. Self-help strategies, talking therapies 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 else they may feel they are a burden to their family and it would be better for everyone if they were dead. Often those who are very depressed think about killing themselves.

If thoughts of suicide occur often or you find yourself making plans for how to go about it, tell your doctor or someone close to you immediately. 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.

You should seek help 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)
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

How to cope

Remember your emotional well-being is just as important as your physical health. Everyone needs some support during difficult times, especially when dealing with a serious illness. Having to face cancer is probably one of the most stressful situations you are ever likely to face. There is no right or wrong way to cope. Only what is right for you. Give yourself plenty of time to adapt. Be patient and don’t expect too much too soon – have realistic expectations.

If some support services are not available in your area, find other ways to cope. Talk to your medical social worker or community health officer too. Welcome support from friends and neighbours. It is not a sign of failure to ask for help or to feel unable to cope on your own. Once other people understand how you are feeling, they can give you more support.

How can I cope with physical effects?

Fatigue

Fatigue or ongoing tiredness is a common problem for people undergoing cancer treatment. You may continue to feel quite tired even after treatment ends. Indeed it may be at least a year before your body gets over the effects of treatment. Fatigue is also common in those with anxiety and depression. Overall, your body may feel slowed up and not rested by sleep.

Depression in children and teenagers

A small number of children and teenagers with cancer do become depressed. For that reason you should watch out for signs that your child is becoming depressed. He or she 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. Some signs of depression can happen as a response to normal development. Teenage years can be hard even for children who do not have a serious illness. So it is important to find out if the signs are related to depression or a stage of development.

If you notice that your child is becoming depressed, get help for them without delay. Nowadays 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. But it is 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. This will give you a chance to talk to others who are perhaps in a similar situation. There is also a useful website for teenagers with cancer called www.grouplloop.org. Contact the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 if you would like more advice, or visit a Daffodil Centre.
It is important to talk to your doctor if your energy levels are quite low, so that he or she can identify the cause of your fatigue. Finding ways to relax, such as massage and gentle exercise, may help. See page 28 for more information on self-help strategies. As time goes on your energy levels should improve. A booklet called *Coping with Fatigue* is also available from the Irish Cancer Society, which you may find useful.

**Tips & Hints – fatigue**
- Stop before you feel overtired.
- Build rest periods into your day.
- 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 all the time you need to get back to your normal routine with work. Just do as much as you feel comfortable with. If you are studying, you may find it hard to concentrate. You may find it helpful then to limit your studies until you feel stronger. Or when you decide to return to work, begin with reduced hours, for example, mornings or afternoons only. Gradually build up your hours until you feel comfortable working a full day.

**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. Not being able to fall asleep may be the hardest part. If you find it hard to sleep at night, tell your doctor or nurse. If you are depressed you may find that you wake early and then cannot get back to sleep. Sleeping tablets generally do not solve this problem, but here are some suggestions that might help.

**Tips & Hints – sleep problems**
- Form a regular routine at bedtime. For example, do a few gentle breathing exercises first.
- Go to bed each night at the same time. Every morning get up at same time and do not lie in.
- 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.
- If you can't sleep, or wake up early, do something. Listen to music or the radio if you are lying in bed tossing and turning. Or get up and watch TV or read a book. Wait until you feel tired again and then go back to bed.
- Play relaxation tapes, or audiotapes with stories, to help you get back to sleep.
- Do not nap during the day.

If you cannot get any sleep at night your body will still get some benefit from lying quietly in bed, resting. Although you may feel as if you have been awake all night, you may well have managed to have several hours of good-quality sleep. Failing all, your doctor may prescribe a short course of mild sleeping tablets for you.

Older people and those not physically active during the day need less sleep at night. If you are taking frequent naps during the day and having problems sleeping at night, you may not need so much rest. Limit yourself to one rest or sleep each day to see if it helps.

If you get help in coping with some of the emotional effects of cancer, your sleep pattern may improve as you learn how to deal with your feelings and emotions. Contact the National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre if you would like more advice.

National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700
Appetite
Some chemotherapy drugs can reduce your appetite. Also, if you are anxious or depressed, your appetite may be affected. This may mean that you either eat less or more and as a result lose or put on weight.

Tips & Hints – eating & digestion
- Avoid eating or preparing food when you feel sick.
- Avoid fried foods, fatty foods or foods with a strong smell.
- Eat cold or warm food if the smell of hot food makes you feel sick.
- Eat several small snacks and meals each day, and chew food well.
- Have a small meal a few hours before treatment, but don’t eat just before treatment.
- Avoid dehydrating. Drink lots of fluid slowly every day, taking small sips.
- Avoid filling your stomach with lots of liquid just before you eat.
- If you feel sick or vomit, tell your doctor as soon as possible. He or she can prescribe anti-sickness drugs that usually work well.

In general it is best to eat a balanced diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables. However, this may not always be possible depending on your treatment and emotional state. If you are depressed and have a huge appetite, you may need to restrict your intake of carbohydrates and certain foods such as chocolate. A booklet called Diet and Cancer has helpful tips on diet and boosting appetite. Call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 for a free copy or visit a Daffodil Centre if one is available in your hospital. You can also download the booklet at www.cancer.ie

Pain
Sometimes with anxiety or depression you can become more sensitive to pain. In fact, strong emotions make pain harder to bear and may affect you more. For this reason 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. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are having problems with pain control.

Or contact the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 if you would like more advice.

Breathing exercises may also help relieve pain. When in pain, we tend to hold our breath or breathe in a shallow and rapid way. If you change your breathing pattern and breathe more deeply and slowly, your muscles will relax. By focusing on your breathing, it may also be a distraction from the pain.

Loss of interest in sex
For some people cancer treatments can affect their sex lives. Any changes that occur are usually temporary and should not have any long-term effects. For example, there may be times when you just feel tired or perhaps not strong enough for the level of physical activity you are used to during sex.

Anxiety may play a part in losing interest in sex too. Often this anxiety can occur because you are worried about your chances of surviving cancer, or how your family is coping with your illness, or about your finances. Your emotions may be turned upside down and you may find it hard to relax. If you are feeling low or depressed, you may also lose the desire for sex.

Change in body image
If you have had surgery that has changed your body image, you may feel self-conscious or vulnerable. You may be afraid that your partner – or a future one – will be put off by the changes to your body. You may feel your identity has changed if you have had a breast or testicle removed, or have a colostomy where your bowel now opens onto the surface of your abdomen. Losing your hair or having a central line in place for chemotherapy may also change the way you feel about yourself.

You may not want anyone to see or touch your body. It is normal to feel that way and it can take some time to get used to your new image. It is important to remember that you don’t have to deal with this on your own, unless you really want to. Though the saying ‘it will get better with time’ may seem unhelpful, it is actually true.
It can be hard to discuss this intimate part of your life. If you have a supportive partner, talking about your feelings may help ease your anxiety. Your partner may have anxieties too and be waiting for a sign that you are ready to discuss them. It may reassure your partner to hear that your lack of interest in sex is not a sign of less affection or respect on your part. Even if you do not feel like having sex, you can still enjoy a close and loving relationship with your partner. Don’t feel guilty or embarrassed to talk to your doctor or nurse about what is troubling you. Knowing how sensitive this issue can be, he or she will only be glad to help you. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist counsellor, such as a psychosexual counsellor, if you think that would be helpful.

There is no set time for you to be ready to have sex again. It varies from person to person. It may take a while and often depends on how long it takes you to adjust to your illness or new body image. Call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 for advice in confidence.

How can I help myself?

There are lots of ways to boost your spirits during your illness. Things that you can do yourself called self-help strategies will help you to cope. They will also help to improve your self-esteem and make you feel more independent and in control of your illness. Finding your own way to cope or adjust to your illness will boost your confidence too. From the list of suggestions we have provided, pick an activity that suits you. Some may appeal to you and others not. Also you may not feel well enough for some activities, especially if they require physical action. Do whatever you feel you have the energy for and think you’ll enjoy.

National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700

Self-help strategies

- Keep an open mind
- Gather information about your cancer and treatment
- Talk things through
- Keep a diary or journal
- Do things for yourself
- Avoid boredom
- Take exercise
- Join a self-help group or support group
- Release tension
- Relax, visualise or meditate
- Try other complementary therapies
- Avoid alcohol or drugs

Keep an open mind

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 your moods are low. Remember cancer is a complex disease and your attitude sometimes may have no effect on the final outcome of your illness.

No one can be positive all the time. It is natural to feel low or upset or have negative thoughts 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 put on a brave face when you’re really finding it tough. If all you want to do is cry, then go ahead. Tears are a natural response to distress.

Having a positive attitude does not mean being cheerful and happy all the time.

What does being ‘positive’ mean?

Having a positive attitude does not mean being cheerful and happy all the time. Accepting that you get low moods is part of being positive. Being positive also means taking an active interest in your treatment.
And also accepting that there are ups and downs of treatment. It is a positive thing to admit that you feel tired, lonely, anxious, depressed or angry. Facing the issues – such as deciding on treatment or making a will – rather than choosing not to deal with them is an act of great bravery and courage. By keeping an open mind it means that you are ready for the ups and downs.

Positive thinking means many things to different people. Certainly it involves facing up to cancer in some way. Because there is no one right way to deal with cancer, people do this in different ways.

- Some people take an active part in their treatment, read all they can, surf the internet, and talk to lots of people.
- Some people are happy to let the doctors and nurses give the treatment and trust them to do their best.
- Some people want life to continue as normal as possible. They avoid thinking about, discussing or talking about their illness and its treatment.

Having cancer may bring great changes to your life. There will be real losses for you and naturally this will affect you. It is true that there are negative aspects to cancer. You have a right to worry and get upset over them. But it is important too not to dwell on them, but to move on and adjust to your situation.

Remember that you will feel better as time passes and your feelings and thoughts will fade. If you find it hard to talk openly to family members or friends, it may help to look elsewhere. Contact the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 if you would like more advice or to talk confidence. You can also ask for a free copy of the booklet *Who Can Ever Understand?: Talking about Your Cancer* or download it at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie).

### Laughter is the best medicine.

#### Humour and laughter

It is widely believed that humour and laughter can boost your immune system. When dealing with cancer, laughter has relieved stress and tension in some people. If humour has helped you cope with stressful situations in the past, then it will certainly help you deal with cancer now. It may help to draw a frame around something that is threatening to you, for example, cancer cells. Laughing at it may help to reduce its importance and the size of the threat. Watching funny films or cartoons may also be good for you. Encourage friends who make you laugh to visit you. However, if humour has not helped you in the past, it may not be the right time to start now.

### Gather information about your cancer and treatment

Learning more about your cancer and treatment can help relieve anxiety and stress. 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.

There are many people and ways to help you find information. These include:

- Your hospital doctors and nurses
- Your GP
- Medical social workers and community welfare officer
- Friends and family
- Patient booklets and leaflets from cancer organisations
- Bookshops and local libraries
- The internet
- Support groups
- National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700
- Daffodil Centres (see page 56 for more details)

Ask your nurses and doctors for information, even if they look busy. It is okay if you ask the same questions over and over again, or new ones each time you see your doctor or nurse. It is also important to ask your doctor regularly about your progress. This will give him or her a chance to reassure you about your illness, or to talk about delays or changes in your treatment.

### Information can help you overcome your fears.
Talk understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Talk things through

Talking is one of the best cures when anxious or depressed. Bottling up your feelings does no one any good in the long term. But sometimes it is not easy to talk. You may feel awkward or embarrassed discussing your feelings. Or else you may think that no one can understand what you are going through. Even if you believe that nobody understands, unless you speak up, they will be unable to help you.

Who should I talk to?

Talking with your partner, or a close friend or relative, can help you feel a lot better. Often they can comfort and reassure you in ways no one else can. You may find that you have to make the first move though. You can help relieve their fears by talking openly about your illness, its treatment, your needs and your feelings. And you can correct mistaken ideas or views your family and friends might have.

However, deciding who to talk to can also be hard. Sometimes those closest to you may not be the best people. You may not want to upset them or put them in an ‘awkward position’. Decide who is a good listener among the people you know. Often you may not be looking for advice, just someone to hear your thoughts without both of you feeling uncomfortable.

Tips & Hints – expressing your feelings

- Acknowledge any strong emotions – your own or your listener’s. For example, if you feel angry or very sad.
- Describe your feelings rather than simply displaying them.
- Don’t feel guilty or ‘wrong’ about the way you feel – these feelings are normal.
- Tell the person how much he or she means to you.
- It’s okay to admit that you are uncertain about the future.
- Don’t force yourself to speak when you don’t want to. You may just want to hold someone’s hand or get a hug.
- Everybody has some regrets. Regrets are reduced when they are shared.
- It’s good to cry.

If you feel unable to talk to your partner or a friend, you could ask your cancer specialist or GP for help. He or she can always put you in touch with a counsellor or contact a counselling organisation.

A more intensive talking treatment is psychotherapy. It helps people to recognise, understand and deal with their emotions and feelings. Specific types of psychotherapy, or ‘talk’ therapy, also can relieve depression. Again, your cancer specialist or GP can give you advice on how to contact a psychotherapist. See page 41 for more details.

Keep a diary or journal

Keeping a diary is a practical way to help you express your feelings, especially if you are unable to talk about them with other people. It can help if you write down all your fears and worries. It is useful to record both emotions and facts – what happened to you and how you feel. For example, you could record details of your treatment and when you’ve been feeling ill or tired.

Writing about your experiences is a good way to free yourself from any negative feelings you may have. Some days you may feel you have nothing to write about, but put down whatever comes into your head. Getting into the habit of writing every day can boost your spirits in the long term. As your diary develops, you may begin to see your thoughts and feelings in a different light that is no longer stressful. You can look back and see how you coped during low or anxious periods. You may even be pleased to see how well you’ve coped.

Do things for yourself

During your illness, you may feel that your life is beyond your control. By doing things for yourself, it can help to make you feel more independent and in control. Try to live life as fully as you can. You might want to learn relaxation or meditation techniques, or even take up a new hobby. Do things that make you feel good and are fun, as it will boost your self-esteem.

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 neutral zone. Support groups can also help you learn from others, assess coping skills and receive feedback on your views.

In a support group, you have less chance of developing depression. If you feel depressed and lonely during your illness, support groups can help relieve your feelings of isolation and loneliness. Research has shown that people with cancer in 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, so a support group might not be for you. It may help if you go along to see what the group is like first and then make a decision. For more details of support groups available in your area, see page 60.

**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. Or else if your pent-up feelings are not released you might say or do something you might later regret. Sometimes releasing tension even for a few minutes can be beneficial. Some ways to help release emotions include:

- A good scream
- Thumping a cushion or pillow
- Turning the radio or CD player up very loud
- Having a good cry
- Writing things down

Don’t worry what your neighbours will think or say. None of these quick actions will do anyone any harm. In fact, they may leave you feeling much better.

**Relax, visualise or meditate**

Finding ways to relax, visualise or meditate will help ease your fears and anxieties. The positive effects of these methods have been well researched. They may also help with pain and other symptoms too. You may need some instruction or guidance with these methods at first, but after a while you should be able to do them by yourself. Give them a try, but they may not suit everyone.
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

**Relaxation**

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. Relaxation is a skill and needs practice. Some people may not find it easy to do at first. If you feel you are getting anxious about relaxing, take a break and come back to it later when you feel calmer. Books, tapes and classes can also show you how to relax.

Relaxation therapy involves learning how to ‘switch on’ the relaxation response by a series of mental and physical exercises. By listening to tape recordings most people can learn to feel more relaxed in response to thinking trigger words such as ‘one two three, relax’. This can help you feel more in control. Focused breathing exercises also play a role in reducing stress. They help relaxation and raise your body’s level of endorphins, which are natural chemicals that boost your mood and sense of well-being. Progressive muscle relaxation involves using groups of muscles around your body and learning to tense and relax them.

**How to relieve stress and relax**

- 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.
- Then 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.

**Visualisation therapy and imagery**

Using your imagination to help healing can be beneficial. Many experts believe that imagery is the method by which the mind talks to the body. Both visualisation therapy and imagery can boost the feeling of being in control. This in turn may have an effect on your immune system and promote healing. Research has shown that imagery helps manage stress, anxiety and depression. It can also lower blood pressure, pain and the side-effects of chemotherapy.

Visualisation is a technique where you form pictures in your mind and use them to make you feel less upset or sad. Some people find it helpful to visualise their white blood cells attacking their cancer. Or each day you could imagine your tumour shrinking bit by bit. Don’t worry if you find it hard to form clear images. This does not make the therapy less effective.

Imagery involves mental exercises that help your mind influence the well-being of your body. There are many imagery techniques, for example, palming. Here you place the palms of your hands over your eyes and imagine a colour you associate with anxiety or stress (for example, red). You then imagine a colour you associate with relaxation or calmness (for example, blue). By picturing a calming colour, it is believed that you will become more relaxed.

Another technique is called guided imagery. This involves visualising a specific image or goal to be achieved and then imagining achieving that goal. Athletes often use this technique to improve their performance. You can learn to do these techniques yourself with the help of some learning books or tapes published on the subject. Or if you prefer, they can be practised under the guidance of a trained therapist. The sessions with a therapist may last from 20 to 30 minutes.
Meditation

Meditation also helps to calm your mind. It is a way of gaining awareness without thought. There are many types of meditation – all aimed at you being ‘at peace’ with yourself. Indeed the benefits of meditation are many. Not only can it give you a sense of well-being, it can also help to reduce anxiety, help sleep and fatigue problems and boost your immune system. You may also be able to cope better with the side-effects of treatment. Many believe that it improves the chance of remission or cure. However, more research is needed in this area.

Meditation can be practised by anyone, at any age and of any religion. It can also be practised anywhere – travelling to the hospital, during chemotherapy sessions or in the privacy of your own home. However, the best place is probably somewhere that you won’t be disturbed or distracted.

- Pick a quiet environment.
- Sit quietly and comfortably.
- Avoid lying down, crossing your legs or linking your fingers.
- Close your eyes.
- Be aware of your breathing, but don’t try to control it.
- Let your thoughts flow into your mind.
- Be aware of your breathing and surroundings – breathe naturally.
- Pick a word, such as ‘one’ or ‘blue’, and keep repeating 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 racing all the time. This is normal and it will become easier the more you practise.

Letting go of any distressing or depressing thoughts for a short time once or twice each day can greatly help you. It is a good idea to practise meditation regularly and have guidance from an experienced mediator. Depending on your beliefs, your religious leader may be able to help and advise you too.

Try other complementary therapies

Other complementary therapies such as massage, acupuncture, aromatherapy, hypnotherapy or reflexology may suit you. These therapies also may help you feel in control of your cancer. It is a good idea to let your doctors know that you are using these therapies first. Don’t be afraid to talk about them. See page 44 for more information on complementary therapies. You can also call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for advice, if one is available in your hospital. Ask for a copy of the booklet, Understanding Cancer and Complementary Therapies or download it from www.cancer.ie

Avoid alcohol or drugs

It is best to avoid alcohol or drugs as a way of coping. Often they can interfere with your medication and harm you. Because alcohol is a depressant it can make you feel even more low. Taking recreational drugs may make you feel better for a short time, but may damage your health in the long term. Alcohol and drugs may also damage your relationships with your family and close friends at a time when you need them most.

What if I need professional help?

Sometimes your emotions may be too strong to cope with by yourself. Nothing you do or say may seem to improve how you feel. If your emotions prevent you from carrying out normal activities, such as eating or sleeping, or affect the quality of your life, you should ask for help. Don’t feel that your emotions are trivial or less important than your physical symptoms. Above all, don’t feel guilty or disappointed that you have to ask for help. It is also important to listen to what your family and friends are saying, especially if they think you need help. Sometimes people do not realise they have become depressed until told so by their doctor.

National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700
What kind of help do I need?

At first it may be hard to know what kind of help you need. However, there are a number of people in the hospital and in the community who can give you professional help. The healthcare team is especially there to give you support during your illness and recovery.

Talk to your cancer specialist or GP about your anxiety, low moods or strong emotions. Bring along a family member or close friend as he or she can remind you of anything you might forget. 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 wash everyday. The doctor will decide which kind of therapy you need and give you advice. If you are unhappy with your diagnosis or the treatment your doctor has advised, you can always get a second opinion.

There may also be a psycho-oncology service in your hospital. This means that you can receive psychological care and support during your diagnosis, treatment and recovery by a team of experts. Usually the team consists of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and nurses working closely together. Call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 for more details.

More professional help

Depending on the severity of your anxiety or depression, you may need more professional help. There are many members of the wider healthcare team who may be able to help you cope with your feelings and emotions. Each has a different role to play, but usually you will only need to see one or two professionals. For example, you may need to see both a psychiatrist and a counsellor for a short while. Not all of these will be available in your area, but your community welfare officer or GP can help you find those that are.

---

**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.

**Clinical psychologist** – A clinical psychologist is specialised in the treatment of anxiety and depression 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. Usually they are based in the hospital.

**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. However, they usually prefer for you to discuss your feelings and emotions with a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor or your GP.

**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 can advise you to talk to your cancer specialist about further therapy.

**Psychiatrist** – A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specialises in depression and emotional illness. The psychiatrist may prescribe antidepressants and/or recommend talking therapy.

**Medical social worker** – A medical social worker is trained to help you deal with any emotional problems or social needs related to your cancer. They can provide support and counselling to you and your family and also advice on practical and financial supports and services available when you go home.

**Psychotherapist** – A psychotherapist specialises in psychotherapy. This is a therapy which explores emotional issues that result in feelings of anxiety and depression. Psychotherapists assist with problem solving, improve coping skills, and can help you and your family to develop more coping skills.
Seeing a psychiatrist
If your GP or cancer specialist decides to refer you to a psychiatrist, it does not mean that there is anything seriously wrong with you. You may benefit from seeing a psychiatrist for any of the following reasons:

- If you have severe anxiety or depression
- To help if there are problems with your medication
- To arrange talking therapies for you
- If, after a course of treatment, you are unable to stop antidepressants without depression coming back.

Types of therapy
If you seek professional help, 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. Sometimes it may take a while to find a therapy that suits you or that can motivate you to change. Give the therapy a good try – don’t give up after a week if you think nothing is happening.

Talking therapy
Talking openly about your feelings and emotions can be a huge help. There are many types of talking therapy available. These include psychotherapy and counselling. These have all been shown to benefit people who have anxiety or depression. They are useful too for people affected by cancer. Although a few specific types of talking therapies are mentioned here, there are many others to choose from.

It is important to stick with the talking therapy for at least a few weeks. Then, if you feel that it is not helping, or it is making things worse, talk to your doctor or therapist about it. A different approach might work better for you.

Counselling
Many people can get support by talking to close family members or friends. But it can sometimes be useful to talk to someone from outside your circle of family and friends who has been trained to listen and help you explore your feelings. The emotions you are feeling may be knotted and confused. Talking one-to-one with a trained counsellor in a more focused way can help sort out those feelings and find ways of coping with them. There are many counselling styles and methods to choose from. Some seek to help the person by exploring his or her needs from a whole-person viewpoint – their mind, body and soul.

Some GPs have counsellors within their practice, or they can refer you to another counsellor.

Group therapy encourages a group to share their feelings and experiences with each other.

Group therapy
You may get the chance to take part in group therapy where a trained therapist (counsellor or psychotherapist) encourages a group to share their feelings and experiences with each other.

Group therapy is useful in a number of ways. It is a format for evaluating triggers that cause negative thoughts. It helps people to learn new ways to respond to these triggers or to avoid the trigger. In group sessions, it is possible to receive support and coaching through the challenging experience of living with cancer.

Family therapy
Caring for a loved one with cancer can affect entire families. It is understandable that families may find it hard to cope and may need help. In family therapy, people diagnosed with cancer and their families can be helped by giving them information and reassurance about their situation. How the diagnosis relates to their previous experiences with cancer can also be explored.

The therapist can help with problem solving, improve coping skills, and help you and your family develop extra coping skills. Other areas of stress, such as family role and lifestyle changes, can also be looked at and advice given. Family members can be encouraged to support and share concerns with each other.

Problem-solving therapy
One way of helping people to cope with distressing life events, such as cancer, is by problem solving. By viewing cancer as a problem to be solved, you can focus on one thing at a time. The therapist will
help you make a list of all your concerns and difficulties. Together you will choose one problem to work on. You will be helped to think of your own way of solving the problem and look at the pros and cons of each solution.

In between sessions you will be encouraged to try out a solution of your own choosing. This is a very important part of the treatment. It can seem difficult to get started, but the therapist will help you choose an achievable goal. The satisfaction you get in achieving your goal can help to overcome your anxiety and depression.

Cognitive behaviour therapy
The way we think about things – ourselves, our world, the future – has a powerful effect on how we feel. People who are anxious or depressed often have negative ways of thinking about things. As a result it keeps their spirits low. Cognitive behaviour therapy is designed to break this cycle.

Even when nothing else changes, for example you may still feel tired, the way you think can have a powerful effect on how you feel. The therapist will help you recognise the negative thoughts that are making you depressed, and will help you find effective ways to overcome them.

What you think and feel affects what you do. When people are depressed, they often stop doing the things they used to enjoy. The loss of pleasurable activities makes depression worse. As a result, the behavioural part of the treatment is designed to give you a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. This is important because it will help you feel less depressed. As you begin to feel better, you will be able to do more. This is turn will make you feel even better.

Can complementary therapies help me?

There is great interest today in complementary therapies for cancer. Lots of people find them helpful and beneficial during their illness. In many countries the way cancer is treated depends on the culture and environment in which you live. In Ireland cancer treatments are based on scientific research, which allows the response to treatment, side-effects and the general effect of treatment to be predicted.

You may hear about the following types of treatments or therapies.

Conventional therapies
Conventional therapies are treatments which doctors use most often to treat people with cancer. These include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, biological therapies and hormone therapies. They are tried and trusted methods where the experience with patients is over a long period of time. Many of the treatments have been tested in clinical trials.

Complementary therapies
Complementary therapies are treatments that are sometimes given together with conventional treatment. They include therapies such as:

- Meditation
- Relaxation
- Visualisation
- Gentle massage
- Aromatherapy
- Reflexology
- Music, art and dance therapy
- Nutrition therapy
- Shiatu
- Yoga
- Acupuncture
- Hypnotherapy
- Biofeedback

Many people find that complementary therapies are very helpful in a number of ways. You may feel more positive about yourself and your illness. You may be better able to cope with the physical side-effects of cancer and the distressing emotions that cancer can often bring. Some complementary therapies also focus on the spiritual dimension of a person to aid healing.

Sometimes hypnotherapy and biofeedback can help if you have anxiety or depression.

Hypnotherapy
Hypnotherapy is a mind-body therapy which can be used to help patients reduce pain, stress and depression, and calm their fears and anxiety. A hypnotherapist guides you to contact your subconscious mind so that emotional and physical changes can happen. It is not a medical treatment for cancer, although there is some evidence that it may help your immune system and have a role in managing cancer.

Hypnosis is a state of deep relaxation, somewhere between sleep and wakefulness. However, when you are in that state you can still
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Can spirituality and religion help me?

Sometimes people with cancer cope better when they have spiritual support. When dealing with a serious illness, it is normal to think about the meaning and purpose of life. Naturally, the ups and downs of treatment and recovery may demoralise you and affect your spiritual well-being. Indeed, you may be afraid that you are going to die, even if your treatment is going well and your doctor has reassured you.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is another mind-body therapy. It is a technique to train your mind to control the way your body works. It guides you to use willpower to control body processes that normally are automatic. For example, usually you have no control over how fast your heart beats or how quickly you breathe.

Biofeedback reduces anxiety and the severity and occurrence of tension headaches and chronic pain. It has not been found to affect cancer cells.

Biofeedback usually takes place in a hospital or clinic. During biofeedback, a person is monitored with electrodes connected to electronic equipment that measure:

- Breath rate
- Perspiration
- Skin temperature
- Blood pressure
- Heartbeat
- Blood pressure

The results can be seen on a computer screen and give a picture of how your body responds to stresses. The biofeedback technician may advise you about physical and mental exercises that can teach you how to relax and so change the functions being measured.

Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies are generally treatments that are used instead of conventional treatments. These therapies include diet therapy, megavitamin therapy and herbalism.

Alternative therapies have not been scientifically proven. Some alternative therapies may even harm your health. Always talk to your doctor if you are considering an alternative to conventional treatment.

If you decide to have complementary or alternative treatments

Before you decide to change your treatment or add any methods of your own, be sure to talk to your doctor or nurse. Some methods can be safely used along with standard medical treatment. But others can interfere with standard treatment or cause serious side-effects. For that reason, it is important to talk openly with your GP or cancer specialist if you are thinking of having treatment with either a complementary or alternative practitioner. Don't be afraid that your doctor will be offended by your wish for other treatments. In fact, he or she may be able to recommend therapies that could be safe and useful for you.

Be cautious in selecting a practitioner. Don't be misled by promises of cures. At present in Ireland, this area is not fully regulated yet, with no register of certified practitioners. Ensure that the practitioners you plan to visit are properly qualified and have a good reputation. Check to see if they belong to a professional body or not. If you are unsure but would like to know what other patients have found helpful, contact your doctor or a patient support group. Also, it is important to make sure that the practitioner is charging a fair price for your treatment.

More information is available in a free booklet from the Irish Cancer Society called Understanding Cancer and Complementary Therapies. If you would like a copy or more advice, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700, drop into a Daffodil Centre or visit www.cancer.ie
How can I support my family?

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. 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.

You might need to give up some or all of your responsibilities for a short period of time. That way you can concentrate on yourself and your recovery. If you have strong emotions, or anxiety, it may be necessary to give up your role as breadwinner for your family, or as carer for an ageing parent, until you feel better. 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.

How can my family and friends help?

Families and friends can support you through your cancer journey in different ways. Some family members and friends can offer a listening ear and give advice if needed. Others may gather up-to-date information on cancer to know what you can expect and what you are going through. Others again may prefer to help you in a practical way with travelling to and from the hospital, with childcare, cooking, shopping or housework. It may take time to know which way suits you and your family or friends best.
Every family deals with cancer in a different way. You may feel that you do not want your illness to upset family life, or feel guilty that you cannot do activities with your children or that you’re letting them down. These are all natural feelings to have at this time.

**Be honest**

The main thing to remember is that being honest with your family really helps. Keeping your illness a secret may not be the best thing for your children. It can put added pressures on your family and lead to confusion. Children are very sensitive to stress and tension and if you try to protect them by saying nothing, they may feel isolated. In fact, they may have greater fears if told nothing.

It is best that you or your partner tell your children about your cancer diagnosis. If this is not possible, then someone else close to your children should break the news.

How much you tell children will depend on their age and level of maturity. Very young children do not understand illness and need a simple reason why their parent or friend is sick and has to go to hospital regularly. A story about good cells and bad cells usually works well. Most children over 10 years of age can take in fairly full explanations of why you are sick. Adolescents can understand far more.

It is best to prepare children for what to expect from the side-effects of treatments and to answer their questions simply and honestly. It is also important not to force your children to talk about your illness. If they rebel or turn quiet, it may be their way of showing their feelings.

**Coping with children’s emotions**

During your illness, your children may experience a range of emotions from fear, guilt, anger to neglect, loneliness, isolation and embarrassment. They need to be reassured that your illness is not their fault. Whether they show it or not, children may feel that they somehow are to blame. But by having an open honest approach, it may bring you a sense of relief. Your family may also find new depths of love and inner strength that will boost your life together.
If you need some extra help in dealing with children, talk to your nurse or medical social worker. A useful booklet called *Talking to Children about Cancer: A Guide for Parents* gives practical advice. If you would like a copy, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700, visit a Daffodil Centre or download it from [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie).

---

**Support resources**

**Who else can help?**

There are many people ready to help you and your family throughout treatment and afterwards.

- Medical social worker
- Cancer nurse specialists
- Psycho-oncology services
- Community welfare officer and community health services
- Support groups and cancer support centres
- Irish Cancer Society helpline nurses

**Medical social worker:** The medical social worker in your hospital can help in many ways throughout cancer treatment. He or she can give counselling and emotional support, and assist with any practical concerns you may have. They can also give advice on counselling and practical support available in your community.

**Cancer nurse specialists:** The major cancer treatment hospitals have oncology liaison nurses and/or cancer nurse co-ordinators. These specially trained nurses can support you and your family from the time of diagnosis and throughout treatment. These experts along with other members of your medical team work together to meet your needs.

**Psycho-oncology services:** In some larger hospitals there are special units that provide psycho-oncology services. This means that you can receive psychological care and support during your diagnosis, treatment and recovery by a team of experts. Usually the team consists of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and nurses working closely together.

**Community health services:** When you go home, there are various community health services available from your local health centre. These centres have family doctors, public health nurses (who can visit you at home), welfare officers and home-help organisers. If you live far from the hospital where you have been treated, your community welfare officer can also help with practical issues such as financial problems or exceptional needs. All these people in community health...
services can provide advice and support. More information on these services is available from the social worker in the hospital or from your local health centre.

**Support groups:** Joining a support group can put you in touch with people who have been in a similar situation. They can give you practical advice about living with cancer. There are a range of support groups that will support you and your family at time of diagnosis, throughout treatment and afterwards. Cancer support centres and groups are found in most counties in Ireland and can offer a wide range of services. Some of these are listed at the back of this booklet. For more information visit [www.cancer.ie/how-we-can-help](http://www.cancer.ie/how-we-can-help) or call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

**Irish Cancer Society:** The staff at the Cancer Information Service will be happy to discuss any concerns you or your family may have, at any stage of your illness. This can range from treatment information to practical advice about your financial matters, for example getting a mortgage or travel insurance. Call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 for information about any of the services outlined above or for support services in your area.

**If you have financial worries…**

A diagnosis of cancer can sometimes bring the added burden of financial worries. You may find that you have a lot more expenses as well as your normal outgoings, such as medication, travel, food, heating, laundry, clothing and childcare costs. If you are not able to work or unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be hard for you to recover from cancer if you are worried about providing for your family and keeping a roof over your head.

There is help available if you find it hard to cope with all these expenses. Contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also in certain cases give some assistance towards travel costs and other expenses because of your illness. See page 58 for more details. You can also call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 for ways to help you manage.

**Irish Cancer Society services**

The Irish Cancer Society funds a range of cancer support services that provide care and support for people with cancer at home and in hospital.

- Cancer Information Service (CIS)
- Daffodil Centres
- Cancer support services
- Survivors Supporting Survivors
- Counselling
- Night nursing
- Oncology liaison nurses
- Cancer information booklets
- Financial support
- Care to Drive transport project

**Cancer Information Service (CIS)**

The Society provides a Cancer Information Service with a wide range of services. The National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700 is a freefone service that gives confidential information, support and guidance to people concerned about cancer. It is staffed by specialist cancer nurses who have access to the most up-to-date facts on cancer-related issues.

These include prevention of cancer, risk factors, screening, dealing with a cancer diagnosis, different treatments, counselling and other support services. The helpline can also put you in contact with the various support groups that are available. The helpline is open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 7pm, and every Friday from 9am to 5pm.

- The website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) provides information on all aspects of cancer.

If you feel you are getting into debt or are in debt, there is help available. Contact the Money Advice and Budgeting Service on the MABS Helpline 0761 07 2000. This service can help you work through any financial issues you have. They can assess your situation, work out your budget, help you deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. See page 59 for contact details. A useful book for preparing low-budget nutritious meals is *101+ Square Meals*. See page 65 for more information.
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

- All queries or concerns about cancer can be emailed to the CIS at helpline@irishcancer.ie
- Message Board is a discussion space on our website (www.cancer.ie) to share your stories, ideas and advice with others.
- The CancerChat service is a live chatroom with a link to a Cancer Information Service nurse.
- The walk-in caller service allows anyone with concerns about cancer to freely visit the Society to discuss them in private.
- Find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter (@IrishCancerSoc).

Daffodil Centres

Daffodil Centres are located in a number of Irish hospitals. These have been set up by the Irish Cancer Society in partnership with each hospital and are an extension of the Cancer Information Service. They are generally found near the main entrance of the hospital and are open during the day. Staffed by a specialist nurse and trained volunteers, they provide a range of information, advice, help and support on all aspects of cancer, free of charge.

Daffodil Centres give you a chance to talk in confidence and be listened to and heard. If you are concerned about cancer, diagnosed with cancer or caring for someone with cancer, you are welcome to visit the centre. Do check to see if there is a Daffodil Centre in your hospital.

Cancer support services

The Irish Cancer Society funds a range of services set up to support you and your family at time of diagnosis, throughout treatment and afterwards. See page 60 for more details.

Survivors supporting survivors

Being diagnosed with cancer can be one of the hardest situations to face in your lifetime. Survivors Supporting Survivors is a one-to-one support programme run by the Irish Cancer Society. It provides peer support to people who have been diagnosed with cancer. All of the volunteers have had a cancer diagnosis and have been carefully selected and trained to give you support, practical information and reassurance when you need it most. You can speak to someone who really knows what you are going through. If you would like to make contact with a volunteer, please call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

Counselling

Coping with a diagnosis of cancer can be very stressful at times. Sometimes it can be hard for you and your family to come to terms with your illness. You might also find it difficult to talk to a close friend or relative. In this case, counselling can give you emotional support in a safe and confidential environment. Call the helpline on 1800 200 700 to find out about counselling services provided by the Irish Cancer Society and services available in your area.

Night nursing

The Society can provide a night nurse, free of charge, for up to 10 nights if you need end-of-life care at home. The night nurse can also give practical support and reassurance to your family. You can find out more about this service from your GP, local public health nurse, a member of the homecare team or the palliative care services at the hospital. Homecare nurses can offer advice on pain control and managing other symptoms.

Oncology liaison nurses

The Society funds some oncology liaison nurses who can give you and your family information as well as emotional and practical support. Oncology liaison nurses work as part of the hospital team in specialist cancer centres.

Cancer information booklets and factsheets

Our booklets provide information on all aspects of cancer and its treatment, while our factsheets deal with very specific topics. The booklets also offer practical advice on learning how to cope with your illness. The booklets and factsheets are available free of charge from the Irish Cancer Society by calling 1800 200 700. They can also be downloaded from www.cancer.ie or picked up at a Daffodil Centre.
Financial support

A diagnosis of cancer can bring with it the added burden of financial worries. In certain circumstances, the Irish Cancer Society may be able to provide limited financial help to patients in need. You may be suitable for schemes such as Travel2Care or Financial Aid.

Travel2Care: Travel2Care can help with your travel costs if you have genuine financial hardship due to travelling over 50 kilometres to a rapid access diagnostic clinic for tests or to a designated cancer centre or approved satellite centre for cancer treatment. The scheme is funded by the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and managed by the Irish Cancer Society. Travel2Care can help with some of the costs of public transport, such as trains or buses, private transport costs, or petrol expenses.

If this applies to you, contact the medical social work department in your hospital or speak to your cancer care nurse. You can also contact the Irish Cancer Society on (01) 231 6643 / 231 6619 or email: travel2care@irishcancer.ie

Financial Aid: A special fund has been created to help families experiencing financial difficulties as a result of cancer. If this applies to you, contact the medical social work department in your hospital. You can also speak to your cancer care nurse or contact the Irish Cancer Society at (01) 231 6619.

Care to Drive transport project

Care to Drive is a scheme operated by the Irish Cancer Society. It provides free transport for patients to and from their treatments using volunteer drivers. All of the volunteers are carefully selected, vetted and trained. You are collected from your home, driven to your appointment and brought back home again. Call (01) 231 0522 to find out if Care to Drive is available in your hospital.

Useful organisations

Irish Cancer Society
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Tel: 01 231 0500
National Cancer Helpline:
1800 200 700
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

The Carers Association
Market Square
Tullamore
Co Offaly
Freefone: 1800 240 724
Email: info@carersireland.com

Citizens Information
Tel: 0761 07 4000
Email: information@citizensinformation.ie
Website: www.citizensinformation.ie

Get Ireland Active: Promoting Physical Activity in Ireland
Website: www.getirelandactive.ie

Health Promotion HSE
Website: www.healthpromotion.ie

All Ireland Co-operative Oncology Research Group
Website: www.icorg.ie

Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute
Ashgrove House
Kill Avenue
Dún Laoghaire
Co Dublin
Tel: 01 280 4839
Email: info@indi.ie
Website: www.indi.ie

Irish Oncology and Haematology Social Workers Group
Website: http://socialworkandcancer.com

Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)
Commercial House
Westend Commercial Village
Blanchardstown
Dublin 15
Tel: 01 812 9350
Helpline 0761 07 2000
Email: helpline@mabs.ie
Website: www.mabs.ie

Relationships Ireland
38 Upper Fitzwilliam Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 678 5256
Email: info@relationshipsireland.com
Website: www.relationshipsireland.com

Health insurers

AVIVA Health
PO Box 764
Togher
Cork
Tel: 1850 717 717
Email: info@avivahealth.ie
Website: www.avivahealth.ie

GloHealth
PO Box 12218
Dublin 18
Tel: 1890 781 781
Email: findoutmore@glohealth.ie
Website: www.glohealth.ie

Laya Healthcare
Eastgate Road
Eastgate Business Park
Little Island
Co Cork
Tel: 021 202 2000
LoCall: 1890 700 890
Email: info@layahealthcare.ie
Website: www.layahealthcare.ie

If you would like more information on any of the above services, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.
Voluntary Health Insurance (VHI)
IDA Business Park
Purcellscinch
Dublin Road
Kilkenny
CallSave: 1850 44 44 44
Email: info@vhi.ie
Website: www.vhi.ie

Cancer Support Sanctuary LA RCC
Website: www.cancer.ie

National support services
Survivors Supporting Survivors
Irish Cancer Society
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Freefone: 1800 200 700
Email: support@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

ARC Cancer Support Centres Dublin
[See page 61]

Brain Tumour Support Group
Medical Social Work Department
St Luke’s Hospital
Highfield Road
Rathgar
Dublin 6
Tel: 01 406 5163
Email: tony.carlin@slh.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

Canteen Ireland
[Teenage cancer support]
Carmichael Centre
North Brunswick Street
Dublin 7
Tel: 01 872 2012
Email: info@canteen.ie
Website: www.canteen.ie

Cancer Support Sanctuary LARCC
[See page 61]

Connaught support services
Athenry Cancer Care
Social Service Centre
New Line
Athenry
Co Galway
Tel: 091 844 319 / 087 412 8080
Email: athenrycancercare@gmail.com
Website: www.athenrycancercare.com

Ballinasloe Cancer Support Centre
Main Street
Ballinasloe
Co Galway
Tel: 090 964 5574
Email: ballinaloscancer@yahoo.co.uk

Cara Iorrais Cancer Support Centre
2 Church Street
Belmullet
Co Mayo
Tel: 097 20590 / 087 391 8573
Email: caraiorrais@gmail.com

East Galway and Midlands Cancer Support
Bracknagh
Ballinasloe
Co Galway
Tel: 090 964 2088 / 087 984 0304
Email: info@egmcancersupport.com
Website: www.egmcancersupport.com

Gort Cancer Support Group
Garrabeg
Gort
Co Galway
Tel: 091 648 606 / 086 172 4500
Email: info@gortcancersupport.ie
Website: www.gortcancersupport.ie

Hand in Hand
[Childhood cancer in west and northwest]
Oranmore Business Park
Oranmore
Co Galway
Tel: 091 799 759
Email: info@handinhand.ie
Website: www.handinhand.ie

Mayo Cancer Support Association
Rock Rose House
32 St Patrick’s Avenue
Castlebar
Co Mayo
Tel: 094 903 8407
Email: info@mayocancer.ie
Website: www.mayocancer.ie

For more details, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700, email support@irishcancer.ie or visit www.cancer.ie

Roscommon Cancer Support Group
Vita House Family Centre
Abbey Street
Roscommon
Tel: 090 662 5898
Email: info@vitahouse.org

Sligo Cancer Support Centre
44 Wine Street
Sligo
Tel: 071 917 0399
Email: scsc@eircom.net
Website: www.sligocancersupportcentre.ie

Tuam Cancer Care Centre
Court Court
Dunmore Road
Tuam
Co Galway
Tel: 093 28522
Email: support@tuamcancercare.ie
Website: www.tuamcancercare.ie

Leinster support services
Aoibheann’s Pink Tie
[Supporting children with cancer]
Unit 22
Docklands Innovation Centre
128–130 East Wall Road
Dublin 3
Tel: 01 240 1300
Email: lindaoconnell@aoibheannspinktie.ie
Website: www.aoibheannspinktie.ie

ARC Cancer Support Centre
ARC House
65 Eccles Street
Dublin 7
Tel: 01 830 7333
Email: info@arcancersupport.ie
Website: www.arcancersupport.ie

ARC Cancer Support Centre
ARC House
559 South Circular Road
Dublin 8
Tel: 01 707 8880
Email: info@arcancersupport.ie
Website: www.arcancersupport.ie

Arkwlow Cancer Support Group
25 Kings Hill
Arkwlow
Co Wicklow
Tel: 0402 23590 / 085 110 0066
Email: info@arklowcancersupport.com
Website: www.arklowcancersupport.com

Balbriggan Cancer Support Group
Unit 23, Balbriggan Business Park
Harry Reynolds Road
Balbriggan
Co Dublin
Tel: 087 353 2872 / 086 164 2234

The Bella Rose Foundation
Merry Maid House
West Park Campus
Garter’s Lane
Citywest
Dublin 24
Tel: 087 320 3201
Email: thebellarosefoundation@gmail.com
Website: www.bellarose.ie

Bray Cancer Support & Information Centre
Aubrey Court
Parnell Road
Bray
Co Wicklow
Tel: 01 286 6966
Email: info@braycancersupport.ie
Website: www.braycancersupport.ie

Cancer Support Sanctuary LARCC
Coole Road
Multyfarnham
Mullingar
Co Westmeath
Tel: 044 937 1971
CallSave: 1850 719 719
Email: info@cancersupport.ie
Website: www.cancersupport.ie

Cara Cancer Support Centre
7 Williamson’s Place
Dundalk
Co Louth
Tel: 042 937 4905
Mobile: 087 395 5335
Email: info@ccscdundalk.ie
Website: www.cccsdundalk.ie
Understanding the emotional effects of cancer

Cois Nore Cancer Support Centre
8 Walkin Street
Kilkenny
Tel: 056 775 2222
Email: coisnorekilkenny@gmail.com
Website: www.kilkennycancersupport.ie

Cuisle Cancer Support Centre
Block Road
Portlaoise
Co Laois
Tel: 057 868 1492
Email: cuislecentre@eircom.net
Website: www.cuislecentre.com

Dóchas: Offaly Cancer Support Group
Teach Dóchas
Offaly Street
Tullamore
Co Offaly
Tel: 057 932 8268
Email: info@dochasoffaly.ie
Website: www.dochasoffaly.ie

Eist Carlow Cancer Support Centre
The Waterfront
Mill Lane
Carlow
Tel: 059 913 9684
Mobile: 085 144 0510
Email: info@eistcarlowcancersupport.ie
Website: www.eistcarlowcancersupport.ie

Gary Kelly Cancer Support Centre
George's Street
Drogheda
Co Louth
Tel: 041 980 5100
Email: info@gkcancersupport.com
Website: www.gkcancersupport.com

Greystones Cancer Support
La Touche Place
Greystones
Co Wicklow
Tel: 01 287 1601
Email: info@greystonescancersupport.com
Website: www.greystonescancersupport.com

Hope Cancer Support Centre
22 Weafer Street
Enniscorthy
Co Wexford
Tel: 053 923 8555
Email: info@hopesupportcentre.ie
Website: www.hopesupportcentre.ie

Rathdrum Cancer Support Centre
St Anne's
Lower Street
Rathdrum
Co Wicklow
Tel: 087 292 8660
Email: rathcan@gmail.com

Tallaght Support Group
Trustus House
1-2 Main Street
Tallaght
Dublin 24
Tel: 086 400 2736
Email: cttallaght@yahoo.ie
Website: www.tallaghtcancersupport.com

Wicklow Cancer Support Centre
1 Morton's Lane
Wicklow
Tel: 0404 32696
Email: wicklowcancersupport@gmail.com

Cork ARC Cancer Support House
Cliffdale
5 O'Donovan Rossa Road
Cork
Tel: 021 427 6688
Email: info@corkcancersupport.ie
Website: www.corkcancersupport.ie

Kerry Cancer Support Group
124 Tralee Town House Apartments
Maine Street
Tralee
Co Kerry
Tel: 066 719 5560 / 087 230 8734
Email: kerrycancersupportgroup@eircom.net
Website: www.kerrycancersupport.ie

Recovery Haven
5 Haig’s Terrace
Tralee
Co Kerry
Tel: 066 719 2122
Email: recoveryhaven@gmail.com
Website: www.recoveryhavenkerry.com

Sláinte an Chláir: Clare Cancer Support
Tír Mhuire
Kilnamona
Ennis
Co Clare
Tel: 1850 211 630 / 087 691 2396
Email: admin@clarecancersupport.com
Website: www.clarecancersupport.com

Cancer Information & Support Centre
Mid-Western Regional Hospital
Doora Doyle
Co Limerick
Tel: 061 485 163
Website: www.middowesterncancercentre.ie

South Eastern Cancer Foundation
Solas Centre
Williamstown
Waterford
Tel: 051 304 604
Email: info@solascentre.ie
Website: www.solascentre.ie

Suaimhneas Cancer Support Centre
2 Clonaslee
Gortland Roe
Nenagh
Co Tipperary
Tel: 067 37403
Email: suaimhneascancersupport@eircom.net

Cancer Support and Social Club
Tienallaghe
Carndonagh
Co Donegal
Tel: 086 602 8993 / 087 763 4596

Coiste Scaoil Saor ó Ailse
C/O Ionaon Níomh Padraig
Upper Dore
Bunbeg
Letterkenny
Co Donegal
Tel: 074 953 2949
Email: ionadnp@eircom.net
Website: www.scaoilsaor.ie

Crocus: Monaghan Cancer Support Centre
The Wellness Centre
19 The Grange
Plantation Walk
Monaghan
Tel: 087 368 0965 / 047 62565
Email: crocus.2011@yahoo.com

Cuan Cancer Social Support and Wellness Group
2nd Floor, Cootehill Credit Union
22-24 Market Street
Cootehill
Co Cavan
Tel: 086 455 6632

The Forge Cancer Support Service
The Forge Family Resource Centre
Petkimo
Co Donegal
Tel: 071 986 1924
Email: theforgefrc@eircom.net
Understand the emotional effects of cancer

Useful contacts outside Republic of Ireland

**Action Cancer**
Action Cancer House
1 Marlborough Park
Belfast BT9 6XS
Tel: 028 9080 3344
Email: info@actioncancer.org
Website: www.actioncancer.org

**American Cancer Society**
Website: www.cancer.org

**Cancer Focus Northern Ireland**
40–44 Eglantine Avenue
Belfast BT9 6DX
Tel: 048 9066 3281
Email: hello@cancerfocusni.org
Website: www.cancerfocusni.org

**Cancer Network Buddies**
Website: www.cancerbuddiesnetwork.org

**Cancer Research UK**
Tel: 00 44 20 7242 0200
Website: www.cancerhelp.org.uk

**Healthtalkonline**
Website: www.healthtalkonline.org

**Macmillan Cancer Support (UK)**
Tel: 0044 20 7840 7840
Email: cancerline@macmillan.org.uk
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

**Macmillan Support & Information Centre**
Belfast City Hospital Trust
77–81 Lisburn Road
Belfast BT9 7AB
Tel: 028 9069 9202
Email: cancerinfo@belfasttrust.hscni.net
Website: www.cancerni.net

**National Cancer Institute (US)**
Website: www.nci.nih.gov

Helpful books

Free booklets and DVDs from the Irish Cancer Society:

- **Understanding Chemotherapy**
- **A Guide to Chemotherapy (DVD)**
- **Understanding Radiotherapy**
- **Radiation Therapy: A Patient Pathway (DVD)**
- **Coping with Fatigue**
- **Understanding Cancer and Complementary Therapies**
- **Managing the Financial Impact of Cancer: A Guide for Patients and Their Families**
- **Journey Journal: Keeping Track of Your Cancer Treatment**

**Cancer at Your Fingertips** (3rd edn)
Val Speechley & Maxine Rosenfeld
Class Publishing, 2001
ISBN 1859590365

**What You Really Need to Know about Cancer**
Dr Robert Buckman
Pan, 1997
ISBN 0330336282

**44½ Choices You Can Make If You Have Cancer**
Sheila Dainow, Jo Wright & Vicki Golding
Newleaf, 2001
ISBN 0717132226

**Explaining cancer to children**

**The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer**
Julie A Stokes
Winston's Wish, 2009
ISBN 0953912302

**Taking Control of Cancer**
Beverley van der Molen
Class Publishing, 2003
ISBN 1859590918

For other support services in your area, call 1800 200 700.
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?

Your own questions

1

Answer

2

Answer

3

Answer

4

Answer

5
Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a special word of thanks to the following for their invaluable contributions to this booklet and/or previous editions:

Mary Carr, Daffodil Centre Volunteer
Seán Collins, Psychotherapist
Rhoda Draper, Psychotherapist
Noreen Rodgers, Cancer Nurse Specialist (Oncology Liaison)
Eileen O’Donovan, Cancer Information Nurse
Antoinette Walker, Patient Education Editor

Would you like more information?

We hope this booklet has been of help to you. After reading it or at any time in the future, if you feel you would like more information or someone to talk to, please call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

Would you like to help us?

The Irish Cancer Society relies entirely on voluntary contributions from the public to fund its programmes of patient care, research and education. This includes patient education booklets. If you would like to support our work in any way – perhaps by making a donation or by organising a local fundraising event – please contact us at CallSave 1850 60 60 60 or email fundraising@irishcancer.ie.

Irish Cancer Society, 43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
Tel: 01 231 0500 Email: info@irishcancer.ie Website: www.cancer.ie