

# Dealing with the emotional impact of upper GI cancer

Finding out you have cancer may come as a shock and you may feel numb. You might also feel angry, sad, overwhelmed, scared, hopeful or lonely.

There is no right or wrong way to feel and it's common to feel many different emotions.

It's important to remember that you are not alone and there is lots of help and support available.

## Things that can help

### Learning about your cancer

Some people find that understanding more about their cancer, including treatment and recovery, can help them feel more in control. Make sure you ask your treating team anything you want to know about your cancer or anything you don't understand. There may be some things you're not ready to know yet and that is also okay.

### Talking to others

Talking to people about your diagnosis and how you're feeling can help. Family and friends can be a great support, but they may find it hard to know what to say. They may also be afraid that talking about your cancer may upset you. Being honest with them and letting them know when you do (and don't) want to talk about your cancer can help them support you.

Sometimes it can be good to talk to other people with similar cancer to you. Learning about their experience and knowing you're not alone can help you feel better.

You can connect with other people who are in a similar situation to you through Pancare's cancer support groups.

### Counselling

It may help to speak to someone such as a professional counsellor, psychologist, therapist, social worker or psychiatrist. Ask your doctor for a referral.

### Staying busy

Some people cope better when they are occupied. This might mean taking care of financial issues, keeping up with day-to-day tasks, visiting friends and family, and planning something to look forward to. Others focus on relaxing activities such as listening to music, reading, watching television or going for a walk.

### Looking after yourself

If you've received a cancer diagnosis, it's important to look after yourself. Eating nourishing food, doing physical activity that you enjoy, and making sure you get enough sleep can help you to feel less stressed.

### Practising mindfulness

Engaging in mindfulness techniques can help you regulate your emotions more effectively by calming down your stress response. This can help your memory, improve your immune system, help you sleep better, and improve relationships and communication – all of which are important when dealing with cancer.

## Connecting spiritually

There is growing evidence that spiritual practices can reduce stress, instil peace and improve the ability to manage challenges. Spirituality may mean being part of organised religion and attending worship, prayer, healing or meditation groups. It may also mean speaking to a pastoral carer or chaplain or simply reflecting on your own beliefs about the world and your place in it.

## Things you can expect

### Changes to your mood

Some days you may feel overwhelmed and other days you may feel hopeful. Knowing and accepting that you are likely to experience many emotions can help you deal with this. While it's very normal to feel sad about having cancer, if you notice your low mood doesn't get better or gets worse, you may have depression. Depression can be treated, so if you're struggling speak to your doctor.

### Changing relationships

Cancer also affects family and friends, and they are likely to feel similar emotions to you. Some may be very supportive, while others may seem to pull away, not sure how to deal with your diagnosis. Others may feel distressed or helpless, while some people may feel guilty that you are sick and they aren't. Give your friends and family time to adjust to your diagnosis.

## Changes to your role

Roles at home, school and work can also be affected. Particularly if someone who had a primary caring role is now the one who needs care. Children may need to do more chores or be more independent, or a spouse may have to take on extra responsibilities. This can be a difficult period of adjustment for some, so be patient and keep the lines of communication open.

## Where to get help

Pancare's PanSupport program has a free counselling service, which provides emotional support for patients, carers and family members affected by upper GI cancers.

To speak with a trained counsellor or find out more about this service, please email [support@pancare.org.au](mailto:support@pancare.org.au) or call **1300 881 698**.

Cancer Council also provide information and support [cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au)

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