

Dealing with the emotional impact of upper GI cancer

Tips for people living with upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancer, which includes cancer of the pancreas, liver, stomach, bile duct and oesophagus

Most people have a range of different emotions following a cancer diagnosis. You might feel shocked, frightened, stressed, angry, sad, numb or all of these at once. Some days you may feel more hopeful. Other days you may feel overwhelmed or exhausted. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Everyone responds in their own way. Your response is shaped by your life experiences and beliefs.

You are not alone. Many types of support are available to you, whether you have received a diagnosis or are supporting someone who has.



What you might experience

Knowing what to expect can help you feel more prepared.

Changing emotions

Many people with upper GI cancer feel emotions like shock, fear, anger, sadness and loneliness.

Your feelings may shift from day to day, or even hour to hour. These are common responses to living with cancer. You may have symptoms such as pain, nausea, digestive changes, appetite loss, fatigue or weight changes. These symptoms can also affect your mood, energy and how you feel day to day. If you can, notice your feelings without judging them, and reach out if you need support.

Impact on relationships

The people around you may also be affected. Some may rally around you, while others may feel unsure of what to say or do. Give yourself and others time to adjust. ThePanSupport team can assist you if relationship changes are adding to your stress.

Changes to your role

Your roles and responsibilities at home, at work and in your community may change. You may need more support with caring for yourself and others or managing work and financial pressures. When you feel able to, talk with the people around you about what you can and cannot do right now. A social worker or counsellor can also help you plan practical support.

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We are here for you

Pancare's PanSupport program has a free counselling service, which provides emotional support for people affected by upper GI cancers, their partners, carers and family members. Counselling can be by phone, online. **If you need an interpreter, please let us know.**

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

You can also:

- speak with your **doctor or treatment team** and ask for a referral to a psychologist, counsellor or social worker
- call the Cancer Council helpline on **13 11 20**.



Ways to look after yourself

Talk about how you feel

Talk with someone you trust – such as family, friends, a counsellor or support person. This can be helpful in easing any worries you have. You can choose what to share and with whom. If talking feels too hard right now, you might start by writing things down instead.

Connect with others who understand

Connecting with others who have had a similar experience may reduce feelings of isolation and improve coping. Ask about Pancare's cancer support groups.

Consider professional counselling

A psychologist, counsellor, social worker or psychiatrist can provide expert support. Ask your doctor, oncologist or cancer care nurse for a referral.

Keep routines and small pleasures

Holding onto everyday activities brings a sense of calm and control. Try a walk, music or time with loved ones. Small things matter.

Be kind to yourself

Your body may have changed because of surgery, treatment or weight changes. It is okay to grieve changes caused by cancer. Explore nourishing foods and stay active whenever you can. Offer yourself the same kindness and compassion you would offer a close friend in your situation.

Explore what gives you peace

For some people, mindfulness, meditation, prayer or spiritual reflection helps them manage stress and find meaning during a difficult time.

When to get extra help

It is very common to feel sad, worried or stressed about having cancer. However, it may be time to get extra help if you:

- feel persistently sad, flat, hopeless or empty
- lose interest or pleasure in things you usually enjoy
- withdraw from family, friends or community
- struggle to sleep, or sleep much more than usual
- feel constantly on edge, have panic attacks or a racing heart
- struggle to do everyday tasks, such as getting out of bed, showering or preparing food
- have thoughts of harming yourself, or that life is not worth living.

These can be signs of depression or severe distress, which are common and treatable in people with cancer. Please talk with your GP, oncologist or another member of your care team as soon as you can. They can work with you to assess what is happening and connect you with the right supports. Please speak to your doctor or contact **PanSupport on 1300 881 698 or support@pancare.org.au**.

If you are in immediate danger or are worried you might act on thoughts of harming yourself, call **000** or go to your nearest emergency department. You can also call **Lifeline on 13 11 14** or **Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636** for 24/7 confidential support.

Information provided by Pancare Foundation is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, treatment or other healthcare services. Pancare Foundation may provide information to you about physicians, products, services, clinical trials or treatments related to upper gastrointestinal cancer, but Pancare Foundation does not recommend nor endorse any healthcare resource if not specified.

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