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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Managing Depression During Your Cancer Treatment

This information explains what depression is and how to manage it during your cancer treatment.

## About Depression

Depression is a strong feeling of sadness. It's a common and normal reaction to cancer and cancer treatment. From the moment you find out you have cancer, you're faced with many stressful and life-changing issues and fears, including:

- Changes in your life plans and expectations of your future.
- Changes to your body and your self-esteem.
- Changes to your everyday life.
- Concern about your loved ones who depend on you.
- Worry about what cancer treatment will be like.
- Worry about money and legal issues.
- Fear of dying.

If your sadness gets in the way of your everyday life, you may have depression. But, depression isn't simply feeling sad. Depression is a mood disorder that can be treated.

# Symptoms of Depression

Depression can affect people differently. Some people may have many symptoms, while others feel only a few. It's important to know the symptoms of depression, which may include:

- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Eating too little or too much.
- Feeling sad, down, or hopeless.
- Feeling like nothing will make you feel better.
- Not enjoying activities that you once liked.
- Having thoughts or plans of suicide
- Having thoughts or plans of hurting yourself.
- Feeling very tired or having little energy.
- Feeling slowed down.
- Feeling anxious (a strong feeling of worry or fear).
- Having trouble focusing on tasks or activities.
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless.
- Having pain, nausea (a feeling like you're going to throw up), headaches, or cramps.
- Feeling like everything is out of your control.

Some symptoms can even be caused by medical issues or medication you're taking. This is why it's important to pay attention to how you're feeling and talk with your healthcare team. They can connect you to a mental health professional who can help you.

# When to Get Help for Depression

You may feel a lot of different emotions throughout your cancer care. Your healthcare team is here to support you. It's important to know when to get help.

If you have any of the following, tell your doctor, nurse, or social worker right away:

- Thoughts about death or suicide
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy doing
- Emotions that get in the way of your daily activities
- Confusion
- Trouble breathing
- Sweating more than usual
- Feeling very restless
- Any other symptoms of depression that last for 2 weeks or longer

No matter how you're feeling, we're here to support you and we have resources that can help. Depression is something that can be treated. If you ever find yourself thinking about suicide, get help as soon as you can. You can call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. You can also visit their website [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org) to chat with a counselor online. You can contact the Lifeline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## What to Do When You Feel Depressed

Here are some ways you can manage your depression during your cancer treatment.

- **Talk to your healthcare team.** If you think you may have depression, start by talking with your healthcare provider. They can help connect you to the resources you need to start feeling better.
- **Get emotional support.** MSK has many professionals, volunteers, and support programs that can help you cope with your depression. You can contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section for help.

- **Join a group.** You may find it comforting to speak with other people going through cancer treatment in one of our support groups. For more information, call our Counseling Center at 646-888-0200 or visit [www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling).
  - We also offer online support groups through our Virtual Programs. Visit [www.mskcc.org/vp](http://www.mskcc.org/vp) for more information.
- **Medication.** Ask your doctor about taking medication. Medications called antidepressants are available to help improve your mood and treat your depression. For more information, talk with your doctor or call 646-888-0200 to make an appointment with the Counseling Center.
- **Spend time with friends and family.** It's important to create a support system for yourself during your cancer treatment. Depression can make this hard to do but staying connected to people who can support and talk with you about your experience can help ease your worries.
- **Do some light physical activity, if you can.** Light physical activity can be going for a walk or a short bike ride. Physical activity can help improve your mood and relieve stress. Talk to your doctor before starting new exercises.

## MSK Resources for Depression

### Social Work

212-639-7020

[www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/social-work-support](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/social-work-support)

Our social workers provide emotional support and guidance to patients and their families, friends, and caregivers. Social work offers programs, including both in-person and online support groups. They can also help with practical issues such as transportation to and from medical appointments, temporary housing, and financial concerns. Social workers are available at every MSK location. To talk with a social worker, ask your doctor or nurse, or call 212-639-7020.

If you're interested in joining an online support group, visit the Virtual Programs website at [www.mskcc.org/vp](http://www.mskcc.org/vp) for more information and to sign up.

## Counseling Center

646-888-0200

[www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling)

Many people find that counseling helps them manage their emotions during cancer treatment. MSK's counselors provide counseling for individuals, couples, families, caregivers, and groups. They can also prescribe medications to help with anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. For more information, ask your doctor or nurse, or call 646-888-0200.

### Location

MSK's Counseling Center  
Rockefeller Outpatient Pavilion  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
160 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> St.  
New York, NY 10022

## Caregivers Clinic

646-888-0200

[www.mskcc.org/experience/caregivers-support/caregiver-services](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/caregivers-support/caregiver-services)

At MSK, the Caregivers Clinic provides support specifically for caregivers who are having difficulty coping with the demands of being a caregiver. For more information, call Dr. Allison Applebaum's office at 646-888-0200.

### Location

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Rockefeller Outpatient Pavilion  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
160 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> St.  
New York, NY 10022

## Spiritual Care

212-639-5982

[www.mskcc.org/spiritual-religious-care](http://www.mskcc.org/spiritual-religious-care)

At MSK, chaplains (spiritual counselors) are available to listen, help support

family members, pray, contact nearby clergy or faith groups, or simply to be a comforting companion and spiritual presence. Anyone can meet with a chaplain, no matter their formal religious affiliation. MSK also has an interfaith chapel that's open to everyone. For more information, ask your doctor or nurse, or call 212-639-5982.

### **Hours**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

## **Interfaith Chapel Location**

Memorial Hospital (near the main lobby)  
1275 York Ave. (between 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> streets)  
New York, NY 10065

## **Integrative Medicine Service**

[www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine)

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. To schedule an appointment for these services, call 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service. They will work with you to come up with a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. To make an appointment, call 646-608-8550.

### **Hours**

Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### **Location**

Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center  
205 East 64<sup>th</sup> St. (on 64<sup>th</sup> Street between Second and 3<sup>rd</sup> avenues)  
New York, NY 10065

## Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC)

646-888-8106

[www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors](http://www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors)

At MSK, care doesn't end when your treatment is finished. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment. This program has many services, including seminars, workshops, support groups, counseling on life after treatment, and help with insurance and employment issues. For more information, call 646-888-8106.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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