

Depression

Side Effects – Symptoms & Solutions

Am I depressed?

You may be sad. You may be feeling blue. But are you actually depressed? It's important to know the difference. The fact is, major or "clinical" depression only affects about 15% to 25% of cancer patients.

Here are some common symptoms to watch for:

- Feeling sad or down most of the time
- Less interest or pleasure in day-to-day activities
- Problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up on time
- Changes in eating habits or significant weight gain or loss
- Feeling nervous, restless, sluggish, or tired most of the day
- Frequently feeling worthless, helpless, or guilty
- Problems concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Thinking about death or suicide often, or attempting suicide

If you have 5 or more of these symptoms for at least 2 weeks, call your doctor or a qualified mental health professional. Or if any of these problems cause major difficulties in your daily life, get help.

As a patient, what can I do about depression?

Every cancer patient is bound to feel sadness or grief at times. As you go through different stages of treatment, you might suddenly find yourself feeling as blue, angry, or numb as on the day you first learned of your disease.

It's perfectly okay to feel that way. To help yourself avoid or handle major depression, try these tips:

- Talk about what you are feeling and thinking. Don't keep your fears and emotions bottled up inside.
- Join a support group.
- Use deep breathing and relaxation exercises several times a day. One good exercise is to close your eyes while breathing slowly and deeply. Working from toes to head, relax each part of your body. Then think about a peaceful, pleasant scene or a favorite place and imagine yourself as part of it.
- Get involved in something enjoyable, even if it's only for an hour or two each day.
- Ask your doctor about medications that help treat depression.

Remember: Don't blame yourself for feeling anxious, afraid, or depressed. Find out what's causing it, fix what can be fixed, and talk it out.

The information contained here is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.

If you experience symptoms of depression, talk to your doctor or nurse and ask them about ways you can manage these feelings. Never take any medications without first consulting a healthcare professional.