

How much alone time

is too much alone time?



Shock, anxiety, fear, sadness. These are all emotions that people may feel when they are diagnosed with cancer. They're all completely normal feelings. And most people need some quiet time alone to feel their feelings and then sort the feelings out. After all, accepting the diagnosis and figuring out how cancer fits into your life can be challenging. All of this is normal and healthy.

Caution, however, should be exercised. Sometimes, in the name of needing to be alone for a while, people can slip into a kind of easy solitude that at first may feel safe and peaceful. Soon, however, this can turn into feelings of isolation, and eventually into depression. That's why it's important to recognize the difference between a genuine need to ponder and an excuse for not resuming life.

As one survivor explained, just after she was diagnosed with lung cancer she isolated herself from her family and spent a lot of time alone in her room. Soon, however, she had to come to grips with the fact that her cancer wasn't going to disappear on its own. She realized that she could either keep pulling the covers over her head or she could tackle her cancer the way she had done other challenges.

A vicious cycle

When people opt to be alone, it sends a message to friends and family, who will usually defer to your desire and stay away. That can lead to your not only *feeling* isolated, but actually *being* isolated. This in turn can make you feel like nobody really cares about you. And that can make you withdraw and isolate yourself even more. It can be a vicious cycle that must be broken.

You may be the one who has to break the cycle

Friends and family will usually take their cue from you. And though it may not seem entirely fair, it might be you who must now take the first step. A simple invitation will be all that most people need to resume their relationship with you and to offer to help in whatever way they can.

Other people may not respond quite so readily – sometimes because they don't know what to say, sometimes because your illness reminds them of their own fragility, and sometimes because it brings up memories of a loss they've experienced in the past. The reluctance of some people to respond normally to you may be hurtful at first, but remind yourself that they are probably doing their best. Ironically, opening up to them about your feelings and your cancer experience may actually help them come around. And it most certainly will help you to talk.

Expand your social interactions

Generally speaking, humans are social creatures. The camaraderie of friends and even acquaintances anchors us and makes us feel complete. It reminds us we're not alone and that we're not the only people to struggle with illness. On any given day, your inclination may be to crawl back into your shell. But giving in to such inclinations may not only keep you from new

and exciting experiences, it can be harmful to your long-term physical and emotional health as well.

Survivors who have joined with others in activities such as dance or yoga classes or even simple walking clubs are in near-universal agreement about their value. Such group activities give people a greater sense of well-being and accomplishment. They impart a sense of belonging. And they take one's mind off the cancer.

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