

New Connections

HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 20



*Is it simply
the blues?*

**Or is it
depression?**

Although it is normal for people with cancer to feel sad from time to time, these feelings usually last for only a short time. Sometimes, however, these feelings drag on and can become clinical depression. That can produce a double issue: the depression is not only a problem in itself, it also makes coping with cancer much, much harder.

That's why it's important to stop a downward spiral from sadness into depression, and knowing the warning signs will help. This isn't always easy because depression can cause some of the same physical symptoms as the cancer and cancer treatment themselves – symptoms such as appetite loss, weight change, and fatigue. Then, too, for a number of reasons, people often go into denial about their own feelings and try to hide them from others and even from themselves. Sometimes they recognize that something is wrong, but fear that it may mean they're crazy.

The truth, of course, is that having depression does not mean a person is crazy. But depression should not go untreated. That can cause greater stress, impair functioning, affect ability to properly follow treatment plans, and generally reduce enjoyment of life.

Depression can be treated with great success using medicines, counseling, a combination of both, and sometimes other specialized treatments. These treatments improve the depression, reduce the suffering, and help the person with cancer have a better quality of life. First, however, depression needs to be recognized and help sought.

The symptoms of clinical depression are listed below. Caregivers, family members and friends should look for these symptoms in a cancer patient and, if they are noticed, encourage him or her to seek help.

Symptoms of clinical depression

- Sadness almost every day for most of the day
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed
- Eating problems (loss of appetite or overeating), including weight loss or gain
- Sleep changes (inability to sleep, early waking, or oversleeping)
- Decreased energy or fatigue almost every day
- Trouble making decisions or problems concentrating that are not caused by medicines or cancer treatment
- Anger almost every day for most of the day
- Crying most of the time
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or hopelessness
- Wide mood swings from depressive moods to periods of agitation and high energy
- Thoughts of death or suicide or attempts at suicide

As mentioned earlier, it is not unusual for people with cancer to have a couple of these symptoms for a short time after learning they have the disease. However, if a person with cancer has symptoms that last for 2 weeks or longer, or are severe enough to interfere with normal day-to-day life, encourage the person you are caring for to be checked for clinical depression by a qualified health or mental health professional. If your loved one tries to hurt him- or herself, or has a plan to

do so, please, call the doctor immediately, as your loved one may be seriously depressed.

For tips on caring for a person with clinical depression, [click here](#).

**For more cancer information, call 1-800-ACS-2345
or visit www.cancer.org, anytime, day or night.**

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