

# Helping Yourself



This information sheet offers suggestions that may help you care for yourself.

When your body tells you it is tired, listen to it. Rest, lie down during the day or go to bed early.

Be selective in what you do when you are very tired. But remember, some activity can make you feel better.

Develop a plan to pace yourself, spacing activities out over the week. Plan adequate rest periods between activities.

While you are recovering from treatment, give non-essential tasks, such as house work to other people. Sometimes it can be difficult accepting help. Your family and friends appreciate being asked to help you with practical tasks such as shopping and cooking.

Regular exercise, without overdoing it, may help prevent depression and the tiredness that accompanies low activity.

Remember, symptoms such as pain can be controlled. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

Drink eight to ten glasses (1500ml) of fluid a day to help your body eliminate waste.

Eat a balanced diet concentrating on fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals and protein, such as fish, chicken and milk.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, try relaxation exercises, a warm bath, milky drink, or a nightcap. Sleeping tablets can be helpful in the short term. Discuss this option with your doctor.

If you smoke, try to quit when you are feeling a little better.

## If you are feeling down

Feeling depressed is natural when you have a serious illness.

You may be:

- having difficulty sleeping
- waking up early
- getting no pleasure from life
- feeling miserable
- eating less or more
- unable to concentrate.
- not interested in sex
- feeling anxious or having panic attacks.

These feelings may come and go, and may last from a few days to months.

## What you can do to help yourself?

Have realistic expectations of yourself and your family.

Do not blame yourself for being depressed.

Build your self-esteem by setting small achievable goals.

Make time every day to do something you enjoy. It may be exercising, being outside, listening to your favourite music, watching humorous videos or having a massage.

Chat with someone else that has experienced cancer. Call **0800 CANCER (226237)** and ask about Cancer Connect). You may wish to attend a Cancer Society Support group or a Living with Cancer (I Can Cope) programme where you will meet others who have cancer. Contact your local Cancer Society for details of these services.

Do relaxation techniques, such as yoga or meditation.

Hypnotherapy sometimes helps.

Individual sessions with a counsellor may help clarify issues and build strength and hope. Counselling can also teach simple techniques to gain control over depression, anxiety and fear. If you cannot afford to see a counsellor, discuss it with your doctor or phone the local Cancer Society.

In some cases medication can help. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

## About anxiety

Prolonged periods of anxiety can be very frightening, however, the physical feelings you are having are the result of your anxiety, not the result of your illness. Anxiety attacks will not harm you physically. Remember your mind is stronger than your body.

If you have an anxiety attack:

Take slow deep breaths.

Distract yourself. For example go for a walk, ring a friend, or listen to music.

Do relaxation exercises.

If you are having a great deal of anxiety see your doctor or counsellor.