

# Emotions and Cancer



A guide for people with cancer, their families/whānau  
and friends





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#### **Publications Statement**

The Cancer Society's aim is to provide easy-to-understand and accurate information on cancer and living with cancer.

Our *Living with Cancer* and *Understanding Cancer* information booklets are reviewed every four years by cancer doctors, specialist nurses and other relevant health professionals to ensure the information is reliable, evidence-based and up-to-date. The booklets are also reviewed by consumers to ensure they meet the needs of people affected by cancer.

#### **Other titles from the Cancer Society of New Zealand/Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa**

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Being Active When You Have Cancer  
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Being Breast Aware  
Bowel Cancer Awareness  
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Questions you may wish to ask  
Thermography

## Emotions and Cancer:

### A guide for people with cancer, their families/whānau and friends

This booklet discusses the emotional effects of cancer. Everyone with cancer copes in their own way. The diagnosis may cause you to feel a range of strong emotions such as fear, anger, denial, sadness, guilt, loneliness, uncertainty, and hope. These are all natural reactions.

This booklet provides practical suggestions about how to talk to others about cancer, treatment and how you're feeling. The booklet begins by explaining the common emotions you may feel. People often say that understanding what they may be feeling helps them cope better. A cancer diagnosis will affect relationships with family/whānau, and friends and each person has their own way of coping. You'll find some suggestions for working together to adjust to these changes. There is also information included for people caring for someone with cancer and the emotions they may feel.

The emotional effects of cancer can continue or begin long after treatment. It is common for people to feel anxious about minor signs of illness or pain, worrying that the cancer might come back. This booklet explores some of these emotions. You don't need to read this booklet from cover to cover – just read the parts that are useful to you. You may find it helpful to go back to parts at different times.

“Cancer turned my world up-side-down.” **Ross**



# Contents

What are emotions?	3
There's no right or wrong reaction	3
Dealing with the diagnosis	3
Common reactions	4
Finding hope	10
Looking after yourself	10
Changes in your body image and sexuality	12
Counselling and Support	14
Spiritual support	15
Support groups and group education programmes	15
Cancer Connect	16
CancerChatNZ	16
Telling others	17
Talking to your children	19
Helping your family/whānau adjust	21
Sharing without talking	23
Easing the way for friends	24
When friends stay away	25
Going it alone	25
People helping people	25
Life after treatment	26
Going back to work	27
Carer's Section – supporting someone with cancer	29
Feedback	47

## What are emotions?

Emotions are psychological effects on the body – they can be happiness, anger, sadness, fear, joy and more. Emotion is how people feel on the inside. The emotions discussed in this booklet are some of those that can occur when you have cancer. They are in no particular order and do not include the total range of emotions you may experience. For many people, a range of emotions will come and go at different times.

## There's no right or wrong reaction

It's common to feel that you are on an emotional rollercoaster. You may find you have different feelings from other people with cancer. This doesn't mean you're not coping. When you're trying to come to terms with your cancer, there is no right or wrong way to feel. Everyone is different and you will deal with things in your own way.

## Dealing with the diagnosis

Sometimes you suspect the truth before the diagnosis is made. You may recognise the symptoms or the doctor seems overly concerned. But it is still a shock when your doctor says you have cancer.

“The doctor's lips were moving, but I couldn't hear any sound coming out.” **Andy**

“When I was diagnosed I felt totally shocked. I couldn't remember much after I heard the word ‘cancer’. I was so pleased I had my partner there to write down what was said.” **Mayuri**


## Common reactions

- **Shock:** You may feel shocked when you are told you have cancer. It is often difficult to take in the diagnosis immediately – you might hear the words but not believe them. There are many reasons for shock: cancer is a serious disease, and most people feel afraid and unsure about treatment, side effects and the likely impact on family/whānau and work.
- **Fear, anxiety and panic:** It's normal to feel frightened or anxious at times when you have cancer. You might worry about what will happen to you. Fear and anxiety can have physical effects on you. They are a bit like being very nervous before an exam or a job interview. You may have feelings of being hot or cold, butterflies in your stomach, and/or heart pounding. For some people it can be so bad that they have panic attacks.

These are very different to being worried. A panic attack can happen suddenly for no apparent reason. You may find it hard to breathe, or feel dizzy or faint. Panic attacks feel awful but they are generally not dangerous to your health. A panic attack may only happen once and have no lasting effect, but frequent attacks can begin to affect your quality of life. If this happens, talk to a medical professional. Most people feel better when they know what to expect. Learning about cancer and its treatment may help you cope.

*Source: CancerHelp UK*

- **Anger and resentment:** Why should this have happened to you and not someone else? You may feel resentful of the good health of others. You may feel angry with family/whānau, friends, doctors, nurses, or even your God (if you are religious). These are natural reactions to the changes that cancer has caused to your life plans.



“I kept bursting into tears at the supermarket.” Debbie


- **Denial:** You may have trouble believing or accepting that you have cancer. Sometimes denial allows people time to adjust to their diagnosis. But denial becomes a problem if it stops you from seeking information and treatment.
- **Sadness:** After being diagnosed with cancer it's normal to feel sadness. It may be there all the time or it may come and go, depending on what's going on in your life. You may feel sad that you've lost your good health and ability to do things that you enjoy. It may be the uncertainty of the future that upsets you most. People often say they're depressed when they're feeling sad. Sadness is different to depression. Depression can be medically treated but sadness will take its own natural course. Sadness is part of healing. It allows you to emotionally process any loss, grief, change or disappointment and then move on.

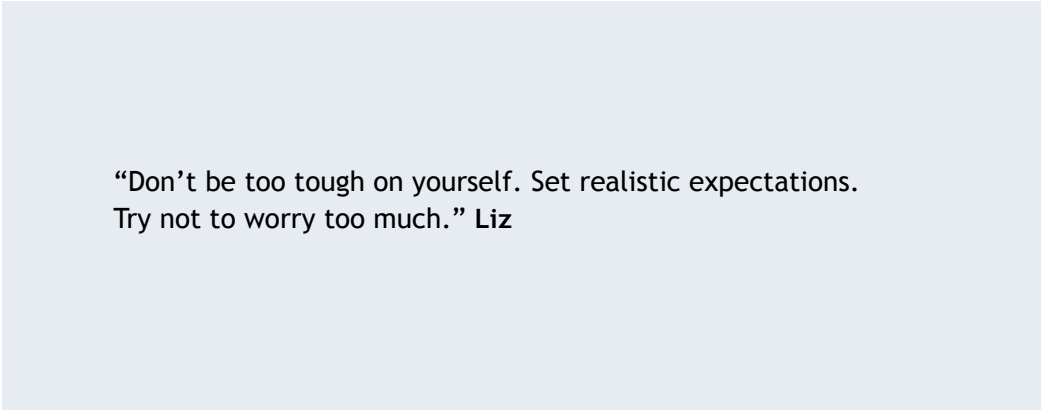
- **Depression:** is a much more intense feeling than sadness. Depression is harder to manage and can affect your ability to cope with everyday things, such as eating, sleeping, hygiene, social activities and work. It is important to remember that being depressed does not mean you are weak.

Depression needs treating. It is a medical illness, just like a broken leg or a heart condition. Depression that requires treatment is sometimes called clinical depression. It is not a condition that you can shake off. If you are depressed, it is impossible to simply 'pull yourself together'. You may need medication, counselling or both.

Tackling depression early may mean that you can deal with problems quickly and avoid symptoms becoming worse. Talk to a medical professional if you are concerned.

- **Guilt:** It is common to look for a cause of cancer. Some people blame themselves, but no one is to blame. Learning more about cancer and how it develops may help. For most cancers there is no one cause and for many the cause is unknown.
- **A sense of loneliness:** When you hear you have cancer or if you are too sick to enjoy your usual activities, you might feel lonely and isolated. It's natural to feel that others do not understand what you're going through.

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- **Uncertainty (loss of control):** Cancer can lead to uncertainty in many areas of your life, and this may cause many emotions. Cancer can take away your sense of security and control. Learning more about the cancer, its treatment, and looking after yourself, can help give you back some feeling of control. Also, remembering what you are still in control of can be helpful.
  - **Fatigue:** Fatigue is often confused with tiredness. Tiredness happens to everyone after certain activities or at the end of the day. Usually you know why you are tired and a good night's sleep solves the problem. Fatigue is a daily lack of energy, unusual or excessive whole body tiredness, not helped by sleep. Fatigue can prevent you from functioning properly and can impact on your quality of life. Fatigue is a common side effect of cancer and its treatments. Ways to manage fatigue could include pacing yourself, learning relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and visualisation. A balanced diet and regular exercise can decrease feelings of tiredness and lack of energy.
  - **Avoidance and withdrawal:** There may be times when you want to be left alone to sort out your thoughts and emotions. This is a very normal reaction for some people. However, if you find that you'd rather be left on your own for most of the time, and often avoid talking to people, this may be a sign that you are depressed.



“Don’t be too tough on yourself. Set realistic expectations. Try not to worry too much.” Liz

- **Effects on your self-esteem:** A cancer diagnosis can make you feel very vulnerable. You may feel as though you have lost your independence and no longer have control over your life. It may also seem as though things you used to do and find easy are now much more difficult. This might cause you to lose some confidence. Give yourself some time to rebuild your confidence and self-esteem.

*Source: Macmillan CancerSupport*

If you are having trouble dealing with any of your emotions, consider talking to family/whānau and friends, seeking professional help or joining a support group.

Not everyone feels overwhelmed. Some people feel empowered when they take control of what is happening.



## Finding hope

Having cancer doesn't mean you have to lose hope. The outlook for many cancers is improving constantly. Some cancers can be cured, while others can be controlled. If the cancer can't be controlled, symptoms can be managed to make life more comfortable.

Often the first thing people ask when they are told they have cancer is, 'Am I going to die?' You may wish to talk to your doctor about what the diagnosis means for you and what the future may hold.


Knowing more about your illness may help. What you hope for may constantly change.

## Looking after yourself

During cancer diagnosis and treatment, you may feel better some days than others. Every day is likely to be different. Nurturing yourself by taking small steps to care for your body can enhance your wellbeing and reduce stress.

### Suggestions

- Try to maintain your usual daily activities when you can. Sometimes this may be less than you are used to, but it may help you feel in control, maintain a sense of achievement and take your mind off cancer.

- Try to do as many normal, pleasurable things with others (time out for fun) as possible. Listen to your favourite music or escape by watching a funny movie.
  - Allow yourself to have bad days and to feel down every now and then.
  - It may help you to learn more about your cancer.
  - Let your doctors or nurses know if you are having trouble sleeping or eating.
  - Try exercise as often as possible.
  - Learn relaxation techniques, such as breathing, yoga, or massage to release tension and anxiety. Call your local Cancer Society for details of local programmes, services, or library resources.
  - Maintain a well-balanced diet. The Cancer Society Information Helpline can send you information on nutrition during and after cancer treatment. Call **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for a copy of the booklet *Eating Well/Kia Pai te Kai: A guide for eating well during treatment*.
  - Ask your doctor for pain relief, if necessary.
  - If you have concerns about your financial situation talk to your social worker.
  - Accept offers of help if they suit you.
- 

## Changes in your body image and sexuality

Cancer treatment, side effects, scars from surgery and changes in body weight can all affect how you feel about yourself and how people react to you. Your self-confidence can be affected by changes in appearance.

Physical changes can affect your sexual functioning and your feelings of attractiveness. Fatigue and depression can cause loss of sexual desire and you may lose interest in sex if you are depressed. Call the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for a copy of the booklet *Sexuality and Cancer/Hōkakatanga me te Matepukupuku* or contact your local Cancer Society. You may find it helpful to talk to your social worker, psychologist or counsellor.


The following strategies may be helpful:

- Take time to get used to any changes.
- Think of yourself as a whole person, made up of your body, mind and personality.
- Talk to your doctor about your options for reconstructive surgery or using an artificial body part (prosthesis).
- Join a support group.

“My doctor really helped me when he said. “You’re in a new relationship, and I’m guessing that sex is important to you”.

**Ross**

- Participating in exercise or a creative activity may increase your self-confidence.
- Sign up for a ‘Look Good...Feel Better’ workshop for women. This workshop teaches techniques to help with self-confidence during and after treatment. Contact the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for details.
- If you find you are less interested in sex or it is physically difficult, it can help to talk through how you feel with your partner if you are in a relationship. Explaining that your lack of interest in sex is not a sign of lack of affection or respect for them may help you both feel more secure.



“I was determined I wasn’t going to look sick. I did my hair and wore make-up during treatment. These little things helped me feel better about myself.” Jillian

## Counselling and Support

Counselling means different things to different people. It can be anything from a cup of tea and a chat with a friend to professional counselling. The aim of professional counselling is to improve your quality of life, and help you cope better with the emotional effects of cancer. Counselling can help ease tensions within the family/whānau and find strategies for coping. It’s also a place to go to ‘off-load’ without upsetting your family/whānau.

In this booklet when we refer to counselling we mean talking to someone who is professionally trained. The counsellor will:

- listen to what you are saying
- help you sort through your feelings and worries
- provide you with insight into how you are thinking and feeling

- help you express your emotions in your own way
- help you work out your own solutions to problems
- will help you adjust to your situation.

To find a counsellor, talk to your GP, cancer care team, or ring the Cancer Information Helpline on **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.

## Spiritual support

Some people find comfort and strength in their spirituality or religion. You may find your cancer helps you find new faith or strengthens your faith, but it may cause you to lose or question your faith. Religious or spiritual leaders can provide hope and support. For more information read the Information Sheet “*Cancer and Spirituality*” on the Cancer Society’s website ([www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)).

## Support groups and group education programmes

Research into the effectiveness of cancer support groups has found that joining a group can make you feel less isolated, distressed, depressed and anxious. Support groups can also offer practical suggestions and strategies about ways to cope. Support groups aren’t for everyone, but if you are interested in finding out about the groups and education programmes in your area contact your local Cancer Society.

“Being with people who had gone through something similar to me made me feel less isolated and alone.” **Ryan**

“Being able to talk with someone who has experienced cancer is a marvellous feeling. With that person I can be completely honest with my feelings and fears.” **Sarah**

## Cancer Connect

Cancer Connect is a peer support programme that puts you in touch with a trained volunteer who has had a similar cancer and treatment. This person may be able to offer you practical advice and emotional support. Call the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for more information.

## CancerChatNZ

This is an online support facility at **[www.cancerchatnz.org.nz](http://www.cancerchatnz.org.nz)**. This is a forum where you can:


- post a message
- read messages from others
- read a nurse’s blog or
- email a nurse.

## Telling others

Sharing news of the diagnosis can be difficult; some people feel uncomfortable talking about personal matters. You may want to protect your loved ones. You could be unsure how family/whānau and friends will react. Being able to share your anxiety and fear can make you feel stronger and help you through difficult times. Sharing the news may bring you closer together.

Talking about your feelings to a good listener could be helpful. Try to identify those of your family/whānau and friends who are comfortable with this. You may find that talking about cancer is not as difficult as you had anticipated.

Trying to hide the diagnosis is usually unsuccessful. Sooner or later, family/whānau and friends will learn that you have cancer.



“It’s hard to think about talking when you are diagnosed. You feel so overwhelmed with your own feelings that it is hard to share the diagnosis in a calm and controlled way. Try to allow yourself time to collect your thoughts.” **Arama**

Most people will be aware that something is troubling you or they’ll notice changes in your behaviour or appearance.

### Suggestions

- Tell people about the diagnosis when you feel ready and in a way that you feel comfortable with.
- Ask for help.
- Family/whānau or friends may be able to tell others what is going on if you can’t.
- Be prepared for questions but draw boundaries. After hearing you have cancer, people want more details, such as what treatment you are having. You don’t have to share every detail with everyone.
- Group emailing and texting can be a convenient and less tiring way to communicate.
- Be selective about who you listen to and what advice you take.


## Talking to your children

Some people avoid telling their children they have cancer. However, children usually sense something is wrong even if they don’t know what it is. When they’re not told what is going on, children may imagine the worst. They may also find out from someone else, which can make them feel angry and confused.

Some parents think they are protecting their children by withholding bad news. In fact, your children may benefit from an open and honest approach. With planning, practice and support from family/whānau or health professionals, most parents are able to talk to their children about cancer.

Consider what you will say and how you will say it before the discussion. Talk to children in a language they understand – younger children need simple explanations and teenagers and young adults might ask for more details. Reassure them that their needs are important. Knowledge and understanding can help them to feel more in control, in much the same way that it helps adults.

Communicating with children gives them the opportunity to ask questions and to express their feelings. Encourage your children to tell you what they know about cancer. This gives you the chance to clear up any misunderstandings. Children may also need reassurance that your illness is not their fault.



Tell other people close to your children (grandparents, friends and school teachers) about your diagnosis and your plan for talking to your children, so that you all say similar things. Trusted friends can also talk to your children about cancer if you feel unable.

### Suggestions

- Tell children how you're feeling. Honesty and openness is important when communicating about cancer.
- Listen – give children a chance to discuss their feelings.
- Answer questions simply and honestly. If you don't know the answers to their questions it's okay to tell them that you don't.
- Some children find it helpful to visit the treatment centre. Check with hospital staff if you can bring them along to a treatment appointment. This may help them understand what is happening.
- Reassure them of your love.
- Do things together. Read them a story, help with their homework or watch television together.
- Ask a favourite relative or friend to devote extra time and attention to them.
- Talk to their school teacher or school counsellor.
- Assure them that cancer is not contagious. Tell them that nothing they did or didn't do caused the cancer.
- Assure them they will be looked after throughout your cancer treatment, even if you can't always do it yourself.


- Keep to usual routines as much as possible and try to let them know in advance if these will change, for example, "Mum will pick you up after school today rather than Dad".

Call the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)** or your local Cancer Society for a copy of the booklet *Cancer in the Family: Talking to your children*. The Cancer Society also has a range of books on this subject that you can borrow – call **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for suggestions.

## Helping your family/whānau adjust

Cancer is difficult for everyone it affects. Your family/whānau needs to adjust to the diagnosis too. As you express your feelings, remember that family/whānau members may deal with their feelings in a different way. Your family/whānau may experience similar fears and anxieties, and need as much information, support and advice as you.

Family/whānau members might express their own reactions to the diagnosis, and what you're going through. They may feel helpless at their inability to do anything about the disease. They may also worry about how your cancer will change their lives.




“Some of my friends and family found it hard to talk openly to me about my cancer. With time, they were able to open up slowly and in their own way.” Harry

How your family/whānau communicates about your cancer may depend on how they have always spoken to each other. Families who frequently share their feelings may be better able to talk about cancer and the changes it brings. Some families are more private or have one person who plays the major role in decision-making. If your family/whānau has difficulty talking about cancer, it may help to speak to a counsellor or other health professional. If family/whānau members don't wish to discuss the cancer diagnosis, they may find going with you to the doctor or treatment centre helps them to understand your illness.

## Sharing without talking

Your physical health and emotions may fluctuate during and after treatment. It can sometimes be hard to let your family/whānau know how you're feeling, and they may find it hard to ask. If you are having trouble talking about how you feel, try:

- journaling, emailing or blogging – some people keep two journals: one that is private, and one to share with others
- drawing, or doing something creative.
- Create an emotions indicator. Some examples include:
  - A chart on the fridge listing different feelings. Put a magnet next to how you're feeling that day.
  - A six sided-block with words to describe different emotions on each side. You turn the block to the top to show the emotion you're feeling that day.
  - Write on your kitchen message board how you're feeling today.
  - Write with letter magnets on your fridge how you're feeling today.



“Some people drop off like you’re contagious, but others offer enormous support. It’s lovely to know they’re thinking of you.” Adrian

## Easing the way for friends

Talking with friends about cancer can be challenging. This is not an easy thing to do but can make things easier for everyone. Sometimes, people offer ways in which they can help you, but in other cases you may have to tell your friends how they can help, for example, taking the children to school or coming around for a chat. Make the most of people’s strengths. Some people are great at practical support such as making dinners. Other people are better at emotional support and can sit and chat.

## When friends stay away

Cancer can change friendships. Some friends handle it well; others cut off all contact. Friends stay away for different reasons. They may not be able to cope with their feelings or they may not know how to respond to changes in your appearance. Your friends probably still care for you, even if they stay away. They probably just don’t know what to say.

## Going it alone

Sometimes people with cancer who live alone can feel isolated. Even people who are surrounded by family or friends can feel lonely at times. If you would like company and understanding, support groups may provide some company, encouragement or helpful strategies. Contact the Cancer Society for more information about support groups in your area.

## People helping people

Sometimes talking to family and friends isn’t enough. You may want to talk to your treatment team who work together to provide care and support for you. The team includes:

- doctors
- nurses

- social workers
- counsellor and psychologists
- psychiatrists
- pastoral care worker, a spiritual adviser or chaplain who can help you explore spiritual concerns.
- Cancer Society support and information services:
  - Cancer Connect (peer support by telephone)
  - Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)**
  - Support groups and group programmes, for example, 'Living Well' offers support and information in group meetings
  - internet support, for example, CancerChat NZ ([www.cancerchatnz.org.nz](http://www.cancerchatnz.org.nz)).

## Life after treatment

For many people, cancer is a life-changing experience. Adjusting to life after treatment may take time. What used to be normal may not feel the same. Your experience of cancer may cause you to think carefully about what's important to you and develop a changed outlook on life, values and priorities.

While you are giving yourself time to adjust to life after cancer, your family and friends will also need time. They have been through a difficult time and they may need a period of rest and re-adjustment. There are many different things you can do to take care of yourself after your treatment.

## Suggestions

- Pace yourself in new and old activities.
- Maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle.
- Resume previous activities, such as hobbies or sport.
- Share your concerns with health professionals, family/whānau and friends.
- Learn relaxation exercises.
- Make time for fun and laughter.
- Counselling can also help you adjust to life after cancer.

## Going back to work

Work is an important part of life for many people and not just a way to earn an income. It provides satisfaction and a chance to socialise. Returning to work may be one way to make your life feel normal again.

You are the best judge of when to return to work. This will be different for everyone and will depend on how you feel. It may help to go back for short periods of time and build up as you feel better. You may be anxious to prove that your skills have not been affected by your illness. Try to pace yourself so you don't get too tired. Consider talking to your employer about working part time, job sharing or working from home.




“After the treatment I couldn’t wait to get back to work. I wanted to return to something normal. I went back part time and that helped take my mind off things.” **Bob**

You might find that relationships with co-workers change when you return to work. Like your family/whānau and friends, your colleagues may be unsure of what to say or try to protect your feelings. Some people with cancer have found that being open about their condition eases relationships with co-workers.

If treatment has made it impossible to return to work, look into rehabilitation and retraining programmes that can prepare you for another job. Work and Income provides financial assistance and employment services throughout New Zealand. Contact them on 0800 559 009.

## Carer’s Section

### Supporting someone with cancer



You may be reading this booklet because someone you care about has cancer. Most people are shocked when they hear about a family/whānau member or friend's cancer diagnosis. You may feel lost for words but think you should say something. You may want to help but feel unsure about what to do. These are normal reactions. You can't make the cancer go away. However, there are many things you can do to help yourself and your loved one.

**Source:** *Cancer Council Victoria*

Carers/supporters report that they go through a range of conflicting emotions when they are caring for someone with cancer. There is no right or wrong way to feel, everyone is different. This section of the booklet describes some of the emotions you may feel. They won't happen in any particular order and you may not experience all of them.

### **Loneliness and isolation**

Being a carer can be extremely lonely at times. Even if there are a lot of other people around offering help, you may still feel as though nobody else truly understands what you are going through.

### **Fear and anxiety**


Watching someone go through cancer and its treatment can be frightening. Fear can be one of the hardest emotions to deal with. You may be fearful that the person with cancer won't get better or of the side effects that may occur from their treatment. You may be frightened of the future — that you may not be able to support them in the right way or that you won't cope with the situation. The person with cancer may have their own fears, which may make it difficult to talk to them and share experiences. Fear can make you feel that you have no control over the situation.

### **Stress**

Looking after someone with cancer will be different for everyone. It is likely to bring a lot of stress into your life as you both try to deal with the demands of the treatment and its side effects or other changes. Feeling tired, upset, angry or anxious can add to your stress. Some symptoms of stress can include:

- feeling very tired but having difficulty sleeping
- becoming easily upset
- feeling anxious all the time or having panic attacks
- regular headaches
- aches and pains
- high blood pressure
- increased heart rate.





If you think you are stressed it can help to talk to someone about how you are feeling. Take some time out and try to relax.

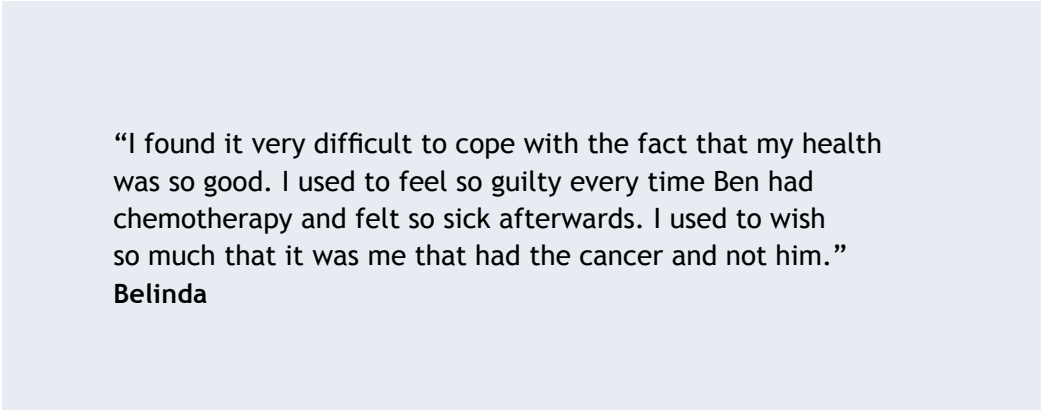
### **Sadness and depression**

Feeling down and sad is very normal when you are caring for someone with cancer. You may feel sad about what the person has to cope with or what they have had to give up because of their diagnosis. If you are partners then you may feel sad about not being able to enjoy things together as you used to.

For some people the sadness may not go away. You may begin to feel down all the time and not able to pull yourself out of it. If this is the case, you may have depression. Other symptoms of depression can include changes in your appetite or weight, sleeping problems and feelings of hopelessness. Depression is very different from sadness. Depression is an illness that may need treatment with counselling or medication. If you think you might be depressed talk to your GP.

### **Guilt**

Many carers say they feel guilty. You may feel guilty for not doing enough for the sick person or for feeling resentful, angry or lonely in your situation. Knowing you are well and the person you are caring for is ill can also cause feelings of guilt.




“I found it very difficult to cope with the fact that my health was so good. I used to feel so guilty every time Ben had chemotherapy and felt so sick afterwards. I used to wish so much that it was me that had the cancer and not him.”

**Belinda**

It can be difficult to cope with these feelings so try not to beat yourself up. Perfection is impossible and it is likely that you are being supportive. It may help to talk with the person you are supporting about how you feel. If you think this might cause conflict, speak to a close friend or relative. Professional counselling may also be an option. Call the Cancer Information Helpline on **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for more information.

### **Frustration**

Your frustration may be related to many things: lack of time to do your own thing, or not being able to change the situation for the person with cancer. Tension can occur between you and the person with cancer. Although it's a very normal feeling, frustration can make you feel anxious, upset or even angry at times.



“One day I felt so angry I threw my hairbrush at the bathroom wall. I wish someone had come along and said to me that it is okay to be angry and it was okay to let that anger out, without harming anyone, sometimes.” **Bev**

## Anger

There may be times when you feel angry about what you have to do or how the person with cancer treats you. You may feel that they don't appreciate everything that you are doing, or that they are only thinking about themselves.

Dealing with anger may not be easy but the following tips may help:

- In the heat of the moment, take a deep breath and walk away from the situation for a few minutes. Try to work out what is causing your anger.
- Try to rest when you can, eat well and do some exercise each day. Tiredness, hunger and lethargy can all set off anger.


- Don't hold your anger in. There are lots of positive ways to help you deal with anger such as listening to music (with earphones if necessary), going for a walk or run, writing your feelings down or talking to a friend or relative. Avoid using alcohol and other drugs to relieve anger. They may help in the short term to relax you but, overall, they will make you feel worse and may make you do or say things you regret.
- If anger has become a problem, talk to your GP or another health professional.

## Resentment

It is very normal for carers to sometimes feel resentful. This may be towards the person you are supporting. You may feel other family/whānau members, friends or medical staff could be doing more to help. People may stop asking about you and only ask about the person with cancer.

People you once thought were friends may have stopped visiting or being in contact. You may begin to resent this and wish that someone would ask how you are feeling. Loving someone doesn't always protect you from resentment.

If your relationship with the person you are caring for was 'rocky' or had ended before they became ill, you may now be struggling with feelings of resentment for having to support them.



“I just wish once, someone would ask how I am before asking about Mum’s cancer.” Erin

You may wish to talk to a counsellor if things become too hard and you are finding that you feel resentful all the time. You may consider other options for care for the person with cancer. It is okay to think like this. Sometimes you have to make a decision that is right for you.

### **Helplessness**

There may be times when you feel that there is nothing you can do to help. You can’t take away the cancer or the pain. All you can do is be there. Many people say this makes them feel helpless. But feel reassured that by being there you are doing a lot and are appreciated.

“I just feel so helpless and I’m so used to feeling in control.”  
Max

### **Loss and grief**

Many people only associate loss and grief with dying. However, grieving and feelings of loss can also happen when someone receives a diagnosis of cancer.

Many changes and losses occur with cancer. You may feel that you have lost part of your relationship with the person you are caring for. You may be missing work, people, regular exercise or an active and fun social life. Certain family/whānau and friends may be staying away because they are not sure how to deal with illness. You may be dealing with an uncertain future and financial changes.

It can take time to adjust to the changes and challenges you are now facing, so be kind to yourself. If you feel you would like to talk to someone about your reactions contact the Cancer Information Helpline on **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.

## Satisfaction

Caring for someone can be very positive. It can be very satisfying to know that you are making a difference. You might feel surprised and pleased with the way you have handled the situation and the new skills you have acquired.

## Taking care of yourself

We are all unique and have our own ways of coping during good and bad times. However, many people supporting someone with cancer say they have times when they are 'fed up' and struggle to think how they can deal with the situation.

## Suggestions

The following suggestions may help you 'hang in there' and feel more in control.

- Try to fit into your life one thing to look forward to, such as a catch up with a mate, a coffee date, time to yourself to read or going for a walk.
- Try to read the signs of stress and do something before it gets too serious – if you are waking up every night at 3 am and can't get back to sleep it may be stress. Don't lie there thinking – get up and have a drink (decaffeinated is best), listen to your favourite music and try to relax. Talk to your GP if it continues.
- Acknowledge your feelings and allow yourself the time to feel and work through your emotions.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.

- It is okay to feel angry, to cry and to let people see how you are feeling. You can't be cheerful all the time.
- Talk your feelings through with a close friend or relative or seek help from a professional counsellor.
- Some people use their religious and spiritual beliefs to help them cope with their emotions. Cancer may challenge your beliefs but it can also make them stronger.
- Take time out for yourself.
- Keep a pen and paper close by to write your thoughts down. Even keep them by your bed in case you wake and feel anxious and restless. Many people say writing things down helps a lot.
- Know that we all make mistakes – none of us is perfect. Accept yourself for who you are. Know that you are doing the best you can.
- You can't do everything so don't expect to – there may be days when you need to leave certain things like the washing or cleaning. Just focus on those things that are really worth your time and energy.
- Remember – some things you just can't change!

It may help to join a support group or group programme such as the Cancer Society's 'Living Well'. Contact the Cancer Information Helpline on **0800 CANCER (226 237)** or contact your local Cancer Society for more information on counselling support groups or group programmes running in your area.



## Notes

You may wish to use this space to write down any questions you want to ask your doctor, nurses or health providers at your next appointment.

## Notes



Notes

Notes

## Notes

# Cancer Society of New Zealand Inc. Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

## Cancer Society of New Zealand Inc.

[www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)

### National Office

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### Auckland Division

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Covering: Tauranga, Rotorua, Taupo,  
Thames and Waikato

### Central Districts Division

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### Canterbury/West Coast Division

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Covering: South Canterbury, West Coast, Ashburton

### Otago/Southland Division

PO Box 6258, Dunedin 9059  
Telephone: (03) 477-7447

## Feedback

### Emotions and Cancer

We would like to read what you thought of this booklet: whether you found it helpful or not. If you would like to give us your feedback please fill out this questionnaire, cut it out and send it to the Information Manager at the address at the bottom of the following page.

1. Did you find this booklet helpful?

Yes  No

Please give reason(s) for your answer.

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2. Did you find the booklet easy to understand?

Yes  No

Please give reason(s) for your answer.

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3. Did you have any questions not answered in the booklet?

Yes  No

If yes, what were they?

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4. What did you like the most about the booklet?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What did you like the least about the booklet?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Any other comments?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Personal information (optional)

Are you a person with cancer, or a friend/relative/whānau?

\_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Female  Male  Age \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for helping us review this booklet.

The Editorial Team will record your feedback when it arrives, and consider it when this booklet is reviewed for its next edition.

Please return to: The Information Manager, Cancer Society of New Zealand, PO Box 12700, Wellington 6144.



**Information, support and research**

The Cancer Society of New Zealand offers information and support services to people with cancer and their families. Printed materials are available on specific cancer and treatment.

The Cancer Society is a major funder of cancer research in New Zealand. The aim of research is to determine the causes, prevention and effective methods of treating various types of cancer.

The Society also undertakes health promotion through programmes such as those encouraging SunSmart behaviour, being physically active and eating well and discouraging smoking.

**We would appreciate your support**

Many Cancer Society services would not be possible without the generous support of many New Zealanders. You can make a donation by phoning 0900 331 111, through our website at [www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz) or by contacting your local Cancer Society.

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Cancer Information Nurses

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The Cancer Society wishes to acknowledge the input and expertise of our consumer reviewers.

**Sarah Stacy Stacy Baynes**

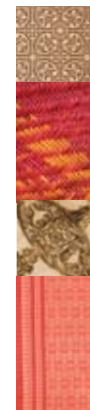
Information Manager

**Photography**

Cancer affects New Zealand from all walks of life, and all regions of our beautiful country. This cover photo was taken in Wellington's Botanical Gardens by Jess Molloy of Moxie Communications.

**Cancer Society of New Zealand Inc. (2010)**

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# ANY CANCER, ANY QUESTION

## 0800 CANCER (226 237)

### Cancer Information Helpline

