



Coping with a Cancer Diagnosis

Everyone reacts to a diagnosis of cancer differently. It is often difficult to take in the diagnosis immediately. It is natural to ask “why me?” or to feel sad, angry, helpless and worried.

Talk to your doctor about what your diagnosis means and what the future may hold. The outlook for many cancers is improving constantly. What you hope for may change as treatment progresses.

Being diagnosed can be a stressful time and this may affect your relationships. Family members and friends may experience stress as roles change and they learn to adapt and cope.

Telling others

Sharing your diagnosis isn't easy. You may feel uncomfortable talking about it and be unsure how you will react when you tell your family and friends and how they will respond. When other people know, they can help you and share your anxiety and fears. You don't have to face cancer alone.

Tips for telling others:

- Break the news when you feel ready.
- If you don't feel like telling others, ask for help.
- Be prepared for questions.
- Draw boundaries. You don't have to share every detail about your diagnosis with everyone.

Helping family and friends adjust

Cancer is difficult for everyone it affects. Your family needs to adjust to the diagnosis too. They may feel uncomfortable or unsure what to say. They will experience the same fears, anger and anxieties as you, but deal with it in their own way.

Family or friends may want direction on how to behave. Let them know how to help. If you share with them something they can do to help, you will be doing them and you a favour.

Speaking to a counsellor or going to the doctor or hospital with you may help others understand and accept your illness.

How do I tell the children?

Children usually guess something is wrong even if they don't know what it is. By telling your children you will give them an opportunity to ask questions and express their feelings about what is happening. Reassure your children that the cancer is not their fault – it's not anyone's fault. If you don't feel you can tell them, ask your doctor or a relative to do it for you.

What and how much you tell your children will depend on their age. To help them cope:

- Tell them how you are feeling.
- Give them the opportunity to discuss their feelings.
- Answer their questions simply and honestly.
- Reassure them you love them.
- Do things together.
- Assure them that cancer is not contagious.

Looking after yourself

Learning to live day to day will be hard; every day is likely to be different. Many people find that keeping busy helps them to feel that life stretches before them.

Tips for looking after yourself:

- Stay active and exercise regularly if possible.
- Eat a nutritious diet to help you to keep as well as possible and better cope with the cancer and treatment side-effects.
- Do as much as you can – this may be less than usual.
- Let your doctor know if you have trouble sleeping.
- If you are in pain, ask your doctor for help.
- Seek practical and financial help if you need it.
- Put your affairs in order – this doesn't mean you are giving up. Everyone needs to do these things.

Where can I get reliable information?

- **Cancer Council NSW 13 11 20. Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. www.cancercouncil.com.au**
- **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 13 14 50**