

# Coping with a Cancer Diagnosis

*A guide for people affected by cancer*

**This fact sheet has been prepared to help you understand more about the emotional impact of being told you have cancer.**

Finding out you have cancer can be life-changing. You might feel many different emotions, and that's okay. Everyone copes in their own way.

At first, it can be hard to believe or understand. You might ask "Why me?", or feel sad, angry, or worried about the future. It's normal to feel this way.

Talk to your doctor about what your diagnosis means for you. You may find that knowing more about the cancer helps ease the fear.

## Finding out what to expect

Getting information about cancer and how it is treated can help you make decisions, plan ahead and feel more secure. For more information:

- talk to your treatment team
- talk to your general practitioner (GP)
- call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- see our other fact sheets in your language.

If you would like to use an interpreter for your medical appointments or to talk to an experienced health professional at Cancer Council, see *Where to get help and information* on the next page.

*"It's common to question your view of the world and your beliefs. Knowing that, and how normal it is, helped tremendously."* **DAVID**

## Tips to help you cope

Each person will find different ways to help them cope with a cancer diagnosis. Some ways include:



### Be active

Research has shown that regular physical activity can help with feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. It can also boost energy levels and improve sleep. Even a short walk can help.



### Eat well

Eating healthy food and drinking plenty of water will help your body cope with physical and emotional stress. Talk to your doctor – they may suggest you see a dietitian.



### Do things you enjoy

Think about what you like to do to relax and feel good. It could be listening to music, being in nature, taking a bath or having a massage. Spending time doing things you enjoy can help you feel more like yourself.



### Draw on spirituality

Some people find meaning and comfort in their faith, religion or spirituality. A cancer diagnosis can challenge deeply held beliefs. It could help to talk with a spiritual care practitioner or religious leader.



### Get support

You can talk to a health professional such as a psychologist or a counsellor. Cancer Council may also be able to connect you with someone who speaks your language and has been through a similar experience.

### Telling other people

It can be difficult telling people that you have cancer. You may feel uncomfortable talking about personal matters, or unsure how your partner, family or friends will react. You may not want to burden others with this information. You may choose to tell only close family members. Who you share your information with is your choice.

In some communities, there can be shame or fear when someone is told they have cancer. This can make you feel isolated or alone. Talking to a social worker, psychologist or counsellor can help.

If you want support to find a way to tell your family and friends, call Cancer Council 13 11 20. If you need to use an interpreter for your call with Cancer Council, see *Where to get help and information* (right).

*“Talking to a counsellor made me realise I don’t have to go it alone. I just needed to be able to step back and see the possibilities.”* SANDRA

### Talking to children about cancer

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, adults may think it’s better not to talk about it with children. Parents can feel scared or worried themselves, and want to protect their children from feeling the same way.

Children often know that something is wrong. Talking openly and honestly with children can help them feel safe and less confused. It also gives them an opportunity to ask questions and share their feelings about what is happening.

If you aren’t comfortable talking to them about the cancer, you can ask your doctor, social worker, a family member, a friend or a school counsellor to help you.

#### Where to get help and information in your language



- **Call Cancer Council 13 11 20.** We can connect you with interpreter services and provide resources in your language.
- **Call TIS National on 131 450.** This is a free interpreting service that can connect you with an interpreter you can use for your medical appointments or to contact Cancer Council.

► **How to find this resource in English and other languages.** Visit our multilingual hub at [cancercouncil.com.au/multilingual](https://cancercouncil.com.au/multilingual) or scan this QR code.



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#### Acknowledgements

The fact sheet has been developed by Cancer Council NSW using information from the Cancer Council Australia *Understanding Cancer* series as source material. We would like to thank the health professionals and consumers who have worked on this information.

See [our website](#) for the list of expert and consumer reviewers for this fact sheet.

#### Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This fact sheet is intended as a general introduction and is not a substitute for professional medical, legal or financial advice. Information about cancer is constantly being updated and revised by the medical and research communities. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.

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Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

