

Supporting your mental health | *Living with cancer and beyond*



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AWARE
OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

x **MACMILLAN**
CANCER SUPPORT

Macmillan are developing their 3-year Psychological care programme of work across NI and are delighted to partner with AWARE NI to provide mental health support programmes for people living with cancer.

This partnership will give much-needed mental health support to those impacted by a cancer diagnosis. Mental health is often forgotten when a person has cancer, as most of the care and treatment focuses on the physical illness.

AWARE NI has worked with Macmillan's lived experience group to adapt the 'Mood Matters' programme to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for people living with cancer. Participants use practical examples to learn that challenging and changing unhelpful thinking and behaviours can make a positive difference in their lives during their cancer recovery.

Encouraging people with a cancer diagnosis and their families to look after their mental health to allow them to recover as a family from cancer is very important.

I hope those participating in the Mood Matters programme will find it rewarding for themselves and their families and give them much-needed support throughout their recovery.

Mary Donaghy
Macmillan Strategic Partnership Manager

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

This booklet has been produced by AWARE NI as part of our partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to help people living with cancer look after their mental health.

This booklet complements AWARE's Mood Matters mental health awareness programme. It aims to give participants knowledge about mental health, things that affect it, skills to help you look after your mental health, and information about where to get help.

While there is a lot of support for people living with cancer when going through treatment, once treatment has finished it can feel like support dwindles. It can be lonely and isolating, not knowing where to turn to access appropriate support. We hope our workshop and this booklet will increase your knowledge of the support available and your confidence in accessing these services.

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What do we mean by mental health?



“MENTAL
HEALTH

is

how healthy our mind is and
how well it works.

It's about our feelings. It's about
our thoughts and how we deal
with the ups and downs of life.”



Sometimes, we use the word 'resilience' when we describe the ability to be able to deal with life's problems and bounce back when we experience setbacks.

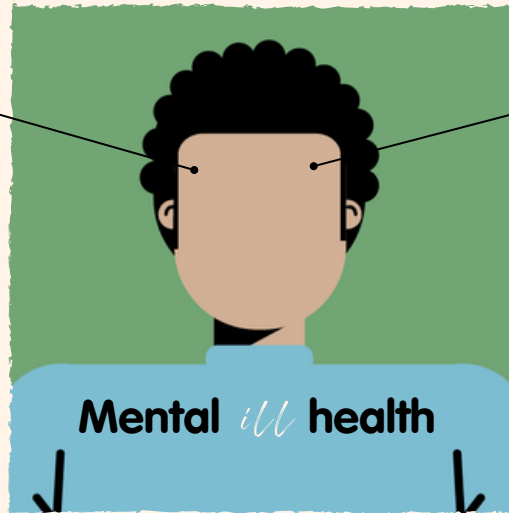
There is no doubt that changes in life circumstances, especially circumstances outside of our control, can create a stressful time which will affect us all to some extent and may lead to some experiencing mental health problems such as low mood or anxiety or even a mental illness such as depression.

What is mental ill-health?

Mental ill-health can be broken down into two umbrella terms, a *mental health problem* and a *mental health disorder*.

*A mental health
disorder*

is a diagnosable illness that causes major changes in how we think, feel and behave.



*A mental health
problem*

can disrupt how we think feel and behave but is not severe enough to warrant a diagnosis of mental health disorder.



How can *Cancer*
make you feel?

You may feel *Shock*



Shock is often the first reaction when you are told you have cancer (Cancer Research UK).

You may feel:

- Out of control and not believe what is happening.
- That you can only take in small amounts of information or need to have the same information repeated to you.
- Disbelief so strong that you may find it difficult to talk about your illness with your family and friends.
- That you need to talk about it over and over again to help the news sink in.
- Unable to express any emotion or feel numb.

You may feel *Denial*



Denial is another completely natural reaction.

You might cope with the news of your cancer diagnosis by pretending it is not happening. This may not be a conscious decision, but a gut reaction.

You may feel:

- That you can't think about it.
- That you prefer to talk about it as little as possible or not at all.
- That you don't want to know anything about your cancer or treatment.



You can tell the people around you quite firmly that, for the time being, you don't want to talk about your illness if you feel this way.

You may feel *Sadness*



You might be sad that you have lost your good health and ability to do some things that you enjoy. It might be the uncertainty of the future that upsets you most.

The feeling of sadness may be there all the time, or it may come and go depending on what else is happening in your life.

People often say they are depressed instead of sad. But sadness is different from depression.

Sadness is a natural part of any loss, grief, change or disappointment.

You may feel *Guilt, Blame, or Anger*



You might blame yourself and your lifestyle for your illness.

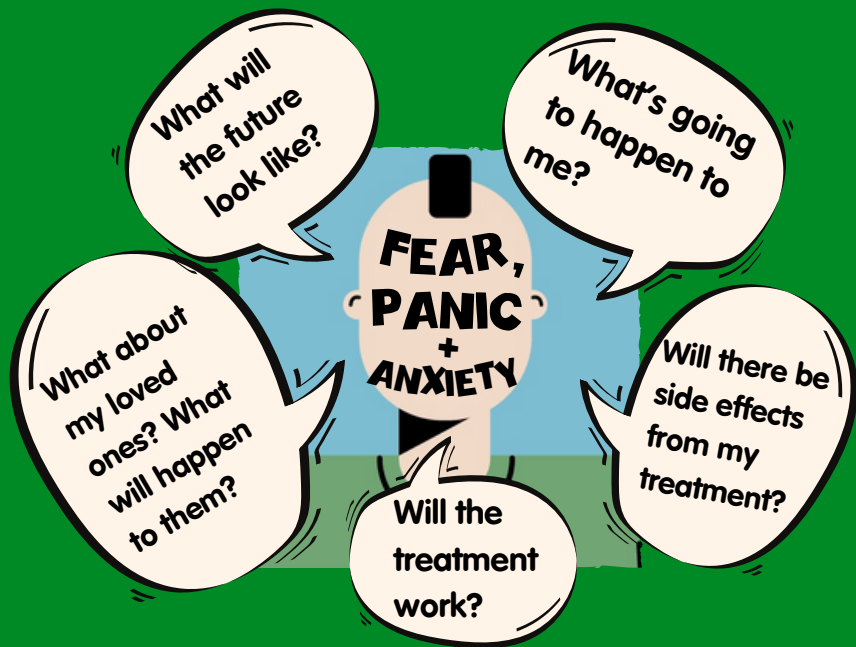
Understanding more about your cancer may help you feel differently. Many different factors come together to cause a cancer.

Often, chance plays a big part, and the cancer is not due to anything that you have done. Some people are more likely to develop a cancer because of the genes they inherited at birth. However, most cancers are not due to an inherited gene.

You might feel angry with other people.

- People who are well.
- People close to you.
- Doctors and nurses who are caring for you.
- Your God, if you are religious.
- People who say 'well-meaning' but insensitive things.

You may feel *Fear, Panic, and Anxiety*



It is normal to feel frightened, anxious and panicky at times when you're diagnosed with cancer. (Cancer Research UK).

You might feel frightened and worry about what will happen to you, the side effects of treatment, or whether your treatment will work may also be on your mind.

Or you may feel that you are coping well and you just get on with it. You deal with any anxiety as it arises.



You may find yourself going through these stages (shock, denial, sadness, anger, anxiety) again and again as you progress through your cancer journey.

Mental Health when you are diagnosed with Cancer

Almost *10000* people are diagnosed with cancer each year in Northern Ireland. (Donnelly et. al 2020)

Feeling *overwhelmed, hopeless, uncertain* and *out of control* is common when you are first diagnosed with cancer.

If you have an existing mental health problem these feelings might feel more *intense*.

Sometimes, feelings and experiences of living with cancer can develop into mental health problems/ illnesses.

30–40% of people living with Cancer have a combination of Mood Disorders compared to 25% of the general population.



The Mental Health Continuum

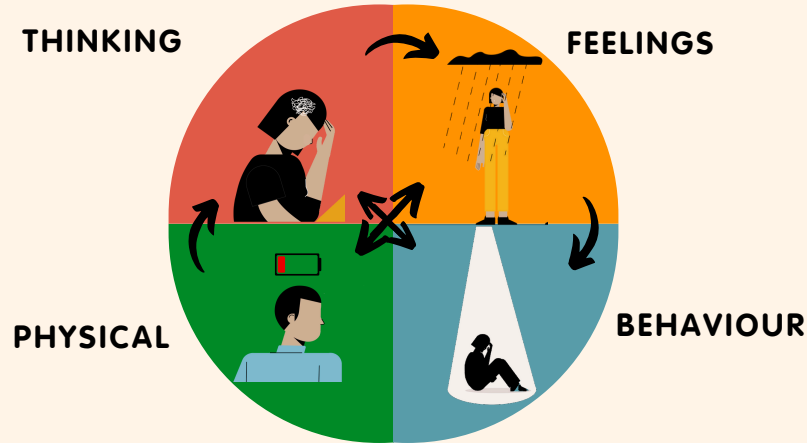


Our mental health falls on a continuum with two axes: one looking at our mental health and one looking at the presence/absence of mental illness. The four quadrants of the mental health continuum represent different possible times and situations in a person's life.

We will move around the continuum in the course of our lives.

The model highlights that we can have poor mental wellbeing even though we do not have a mental illness and good mental wellbeing even with the presence of a mental health diagnosis if we are coping well through taking medication, good support, and self-help techniques.

Challenging and changing your thinking



People respond differently to situations and events. What might cause one person to feel stress and anxiety may not affect another in the same way.

It is not the situation or event that causes stress and anxiety but how you think about the event that impacts how you behave and how you feel mentally and physically. Negative thinking can create a *vicious circle* where thoughts, feelings, and behaviours feed into each other, making you feel worse and worse.

Helpful Thinking

My loved ones will be there to help and support me.

My work will be understanding.

There are lots of organisations that help people in this situation.

I am not alone there are other people going through this journey.



If I try to think in this manner, this could have a positive benefit on my mind and body and can turn the **vicious cycle** into a **virtuous cycle**.

How can a cancer diagnosis affect my mental health?



THINKING

Why me?
What did I do wrong?
What am I going to do?
Are things going to be okay?

PHYSICAL

Loss of energy / fatigued
Tiredness
Nausea
Headaches

FEELINGS

Low, sad & vulnerable
Anxious & scared
Numb
Disbelief & shocked
Anger & frustration

BEHAVIOUR

Crying
Difficulty concentrating
Disrupted sleep
Eating impacted
Stepping away from work

Factors that may contribute to *depression* and *anxiety* among people living with cancer and beyond cancer

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

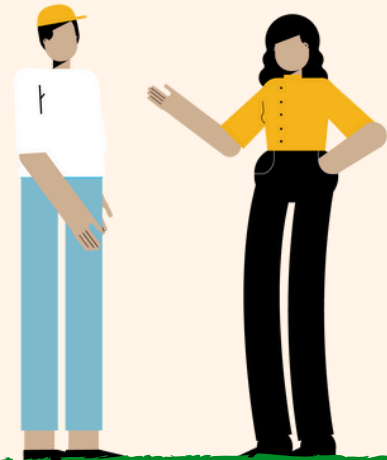
Such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion, biological factors (genetics), co-morbid health conditions, and marital and co-habitation status.

PRIOR PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Such as pre-existing psychiatric disorder(s), previous suicidal behaviour, personality (e.g. neuroticism), prior coping behaviour (e/g adverse health behaviours).

SOCIAL & CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Such as education level, employment status, household income and wealth, family, social support, stressful life events (e.g. bereavement), healthcare system and welfare system.



CHARACTERISTICS OF CANCER

Such as diagnosis experience, symptoms, type of cancer, stage and grade of cancer, prognosis and curability, functional decline, recurrence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO DIAGNOSIS

Such as psychological distress, coping behaviour, feelings of hopelessness, denial, anger, fear, grief, resilience, concern for others, and change in self image.

CANCER TREATMENT

Such as treatment modality and dose (e.g. radiotherapy, chemotherapy), side effects, long terms complications (e.g. infertility, secondary cancers), setting (e.g. inpatient, outpatient), treatment burden and length, cost of treatment, response to treatment, and phase (e.g. acute, palliative).



Let's talk about *Stress*

Stress is.... When we think the demands placed upon us exceed our ability to cope.

Anxiety UK

We all experience stress differently in different situations. It affects how we think, feel, behave and how our body feels. Stress is a physical reaction.

It is no surprise that given all the challenges involved in managing change and difficult circumstances that even the best prepared and supported people will experience symptoms of stress and anxiety at some stage. These feelings are normal and some stress can actually be good for you as it can motivate you and help you focus on what you are doing.

However, in the long term, stress can be harmful and impact adversely on your mental wellbeing, so it is important to know the signs and symptoms early and have ways of dealing with it.



Let's talk about *Anxiety*

Anxiety **is....** a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear that can be mild to severe.



Normal anxiety relates to a specific situation or problem, it only lasts as long as the situation or problem is present. It reacts in an appropriate and proportional way to the situation or problem.

As you can see normal anxiety is a realistic, measured, time sensitive and natural thing for us to feel. However, if you do feel that you are experiencing anxiety beyond these levels, you should speak to a medical professional such as your GP.

Symptoms of Anxiety

worrying
about the
past or future

overthinking

tight
chest

avoidance

loss of
appetite

muscle
tension

stomach
cramps

second
guessing

sweating

what if
thinking

Let's talk about *Depression*

Depression **is....** more than the 'normal' feelings of sadness we all experience from time to time.



It is a common mental illness that affects our thinking, feelings, behaviour and physical wellbeing.



1 in 5 adults will suffer from a mental health problem at some stage in life, and 100,000 people in Northern Ireland suffer from depression at any point in time.

Depression is not the same as the low mood or sadness that we all experience from time to time. Everyone feels sad or down at times but it passes after a short while and you just get on with your life.

Depression is a serious medical illness which leaves you feeling sad or miserable most of the time. It can interfere with your work and relationships. Depression affects how we feel, how we think, how we behave and can also affect us physically.

Depression and cancer



It is completely understandable to have very strong feelings of sadness for some time after your diagnosis or during your treatment. But this is not the same as being depressed.

Depression is said to be the least recognised symptom in people with cancer. It can be one of the hardest things for you and your family to cope with.

Doctors are better at diagnosing and treating depression in people with cancer. We're still not sure exactly how common it is, and much more research needs to be done.

Depression can happen soon after your cancer diagnosis, but it is also quite normal to become depressed after finishing your treatment.

Depression and anxiety when you are living with cancer

A wide systematic review shows the prevalence of depression and anxiety in patients treated for cancer, greatly exceeding population estimates.

	People Living with Cancer	General Population
Major Depression	15%	2%
Minor Depression	20%	5%
Anxiety	10%	7%

Mental illness signs and symptoms to look out for:

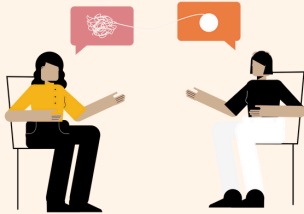
- An unusually sad mood that does not go away.
- Tiredness and lack of energy.
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities.
- Difficulty in concentrating and making decisions.
- Difficulty in sleeping.
- Weight gain or weight loss.
- The feeling of guilt when not at fault.

Source: Mitchell AJ, Chan M, Bhatti H, et al. Prevalence of depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorder in oncological, haematological, and palliative-care settings: a meta-analysis of 94 interview-based studies. *Lancet Oncol* 2011; 12: 160-7

Help for depression and anxiety

Like all illnesses the sooner you get help the better. So if you feel that you are experiencing some of the symptoms of depression or anxiety you should talk to your GP in the first instance. They may recommend one or a combination of the following.

Talking Therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy



Talking therapies have been proven to be one of the most effective methods to help overcome depression.

Medication



There is also a huge evidence base for the effectiveness of antidepressant medication, often used in conjunction with CBT.

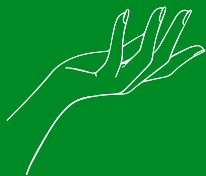
Self-help Strategies



Self-help is vitally important in order to recover from depression, we will be looking at the most evidenced ways in the next pages.

Take 5 Approach to Wellbeing

Worldwide research indicates that the following are the most evidence-based ways of looking after your mental health. They are sometimes referred to as the '*Five Ways to Wellbeing*' or '*Take 5*'.



Give:

Give your time
and your love
to others.



Be Active:

Build exercise
into your
everyday life.



Connect:

Stay connected
to the people
around you.



Take Notice:

Focus on the
present and
savour each
moment.



Keep Learning:

Stay curious
and keep
learning.

For more information please visit:
www.mindingyourhead.info

Take5
steps to wellbeing

HSC Public Health
Agency

Give



Helping others, like doing something nice for a loved one, thanking someone, smiling, giving compliments, or volunteering, benefits your emotional wellbeing. You might experience these small acts of kindness during or after cancer treatment and there is a huge benefit for your emotional wellbeing in paying this kindness forward to others. Paying kindness forward improves mental health by creating positive feelings, a sense of purpose, and connections with others.

Be Active



Physical activity can have a huge impact on your health and wellbeing. Exercise releases feel-good hormones called endorphins in the brain which improves mood and reduces stress. Activities like gardening, walking, cycling, and dancing count towards your daily 30 minutes. Break it into manageable 10-minute sessions if needed. Even simple stretching exercises from a chair can help improve circulation and muscle strength. Find an activity you enjoy and matches your fitness level and mobility.

Connect



Maintaining healthy relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Some ways to stay in touch with friends and family include by phone, letter, messaging, video calls or social media. Loneliness can also have a detrimental effect on our mental health. If you prefer not to physically see friends and family at this time, technology can be a great way to stay in contact. Asking for help in setting up phone and video calls to your loved ones can help prevent social isolation, this will improve mental wellbeing.

Take Notice



Sometimes this is called mindfulness. Being aware helps you to reflect on your experiences and take notice of what matters to you. In practice this can look like: taking a moment to stop, pause, and to be still and look around you. Or reflecting on good and positive experiences that can help you appreciate what matters to you. It can also include listening to gentle music, or reducing your time watching the news and browsing social media.

Keep Learning



Learning new things gives us a sense of achievement, increased confidence and enjoyment. Don't be afraid to try something new, rediscover an old hobby, research something that interests you, learn a new craft or learn to play an instrument. Set a challenge you will enjoy. Learning new things will make you more confident and it is a fun thing to do.

You might also find these things helpful...



Other ways to look after your mental health



Look after your body

Our physical health has a big impact on how we feel.

At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour that end up making you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water and exercise regularly. Avoid smoking, drugs or drinking too much alcohol.



Sleep is important

Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how we feel.

Try to maintain your regular sleeping pattern and stick to good sleep practices. Sleeping helps us to recover from mental as well as physical exertion of the day. Sleep disturbances can be one of the first signs of distress.



Have a routine

Many people worry continually which can take a toll on their mental wellbeing.

When you're worried, make a plan to overcome the problem. Whether you write it down or discuss it with someone, it increases your chances of finding a solution for both present and future concerns.

Other ways to look after your mental health



Talk about your worries

It is normal to feel a bit worried or helpless about the current situation.

Remember it is OK to share your concerns with others you trust and doing so may help them too. If you cannot speak to someone you know or if doing so has not helped, there are plenty of helplines you can try instead.



Do one thing you enjoy

Filling your time doing more things you like can stop you from focusing on feelings of loneliness and is good for your wellbeing.

Make an effort to focus on your favourite hobby if it is something you can still do, or start a new hobby.



Relax and self-care

Self-care can reduce stress and anxiety.

Any activity that makes you feel more relaxed can help to reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety and to lift your mood. Self-care are acts that contribute to looking after your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself.

Do *One thing*



But remember to focus on doing just **one thing** at a time. It will help you to reach the goals you set and get a real sense of achievement.

Where can I *Get Support?*



MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT



Macmillan Cancer Support website: www.macmillan.org.uk



To get support: The Macmillan Support Line is open 7 days a week between 8am-8pm on **0808 808 00 00**



For welfare or benefits advice in Northern Ireland: Benefits Advice Triage Number: **0300 1 233 233**



For information on what information and support is available in your area: www.macmillan.org.uk/in-your-area



To connect with **Macmillan online community**



Where can I
Get Support?



0808 808 8000



for information
about our FREE
mental health
support groups
please scan the
QR code:



“ It doesn’t matter where you are in your cancer journey, whether you have just been diagnosed, whether you are in the middle of treatment, or you’ve rung the bell. Do this course. ”



AWARE NI is the depression charity for Northern Ireland

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