

**Know when to  
seek professional  
help for your  
MENTAL  
HEALTH**

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

Receiving a blood cancer diagnosis can be challenging and overwhelming. Along with physical symptoms, individuals with a blood cancer diagnosis may experience serious mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Since your mental health is just as important as your physical health, this fact sheet will help you:

- Identify the symptoms of mental health issues that can occur at various times in your blood cancer experience
- Know when it is time to seek professional help for your mental health
- Learn strategies for managing your mental health in your day-to-day life
- Understand how taking care of your mental health benefits your life



## Mental health challenges

Some of the serious mental health issues that could arise during your cancer experience include the following:

### **Depression**

Common for many individuals, depression can affect anyone, regardless of their diagnosis. Depression may be triggered by biological factors, life events, medications, treatments, or a combination of these. Symptoms can include sadness that does not go away, little or no interest in activities that used to bring you pleasure, guilt, helplessness or despair, irritability, crying often or long periods, trouble seeing solutions or hope.

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a normal response when being diagnosed with a blood cancer, but your anxiety might get so bad it overwhelms you and impacts your daily life. Symptoms can include difficulty relaxing, sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, faster heartbeat, headaches and muscle pain, appetite disorders, diarrhea, weakness or dizziness, tight feeling in your throat or chest.

### **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

The trauma of a blood cancer diagnosis and its treatment can lead to PTSD. Flashbacks, nightmares, and intense anxiety can persist long after the initial diagnosis or into cancer survivorship. Other symptoms of PTSD can include persistent and invasive negative thoughts, avoidance or reactive behaviour, over-excitement, hypervigilance, and a feeling of wanting to control everything.

## When is it time to get help?

The first step is recognizing the symptoms of mental health problems.

**Some of these symptoms may be related to your cancer treatment's side effects – it's vital that you seek a professional evaluation.**

You are recommended to **consult a healthcare professional if you experience any of the following symptoms persistently for *two weeks or longer*:**

- Sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness
- Irritability, agitation, or general loss of energy
- Loss of motivation, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or excessive sleeping)
- Hopelessness about the future
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- Slowed thinking, trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions.

***Seek help right away if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, self-harm, substance abuse (alcohol, drugs), or an eating disorder.***



Some studies estimate the prevalence of **DEPRESSION** and **ANXIETY** in people treated for cancer to be at least **DOUBLE** that in the general public

(Mental Health Commission of Canada & Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, 2021)



## Mental health challenges can happen anytime during your blood cancer experience

### Pre-diagnosis

The wait between various tests and your diagnosis may seem endless. During this period, you may feel uncertain, worried or anxious, and that may have a big impact on your regular activities. The most difficult part of waiting is feeling that you've lost control. You may also fear the unknown.



### Newly diagnosed

You will likely experience feelings of shock, fear, sadness, and uncertainty when you're diagnosed with a blood cancer. You may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information you have to remember and decisions you have to make. Telling family and friends about your diagnosis is often the hardest part emotionally. All these factors can contribute to the development of depression. Addressing and managing depressive symptoms early on is important.

### In treatment

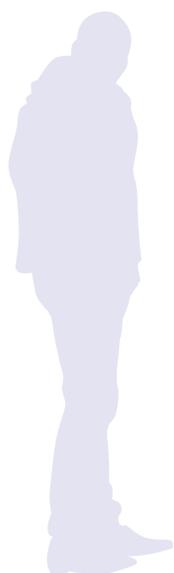
When you are diagnosed, you will probably want to start your treatment right away. For some types of blood cancers, the best option is watch-and-wait, also known as active surveillance, with monitoring by your healthcare team. The wait may be hard, and you may experience anxiety. The treatment phase of blood cancer can be physically and emotionally demanding. The side effects of treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and immunotherapy, may worsen depressive symptoms. Coping with the challenges of treatment, including physical discomfort, changes in your appearance, and disruptions to your daily life, can also contribute to depression. It is important for individuals in treatment to prioritize their mental health and seek appropriate support.

### Relapse

The recurrence of cancer may cause you to feel similar despair, fear and anxiety as you felt with your first diagnosis. That does not mean you know how to handle these mental health challenges during relapse; you will need support.

### Survivorship

While completing treatment and moving into cancer survivorship can be significant milestones, mental health challenges do not necessarily disappear. Many cancer survivors continue to grapple with mental health issues after cancer treatment. The fear of recurrence, body image concerns, relationship changes, and adjusting to a "new normal" way of living can all contribute to symptoms of depression. You will need to manage your mental health as you navigate life after cancer.





## Strategies for managing your mental health

Asking for help is not a weakness. Seeking help is a strength, and an indication of your commitment to doing as well as possible during your cancer experience.

### Seek professional help

Talk with your doctor or cancer healthcare team about your signs of potential mental health issues. They can refer you a mental health professional who can provide the necessary support.

### Consider medication

In some cases, antidepressant or anti-anxiety medications may be prescribed by a healthcare professional to help alleviate symptoms. Consult your doctor to determine if medication is appropriate for you.

### Engage in self-care

Prioritize self-care activities that promote your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This may include exercise under the guidance of your health care professionals, pursuing hobbies, spending time in nature, journaling, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

### Practice mindfulness and relaxation

Incorporate mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing and other relaxation exercises or meditation, to help manage your stress and reduce symptoms of depression.

### Build a personal support system

Surround yourself with friends and family who can offer empathy and encouragement during your experience.

## Benefits of managing your mental health

### Improved quality of life

Living with these mental health challenges can significantly impact your overall well-being and quality of life. By addressing the symptoms, you can improve your mood, improve your relationships, and regain enjoyment in daily activities.

### Physical health

Mental health can affect your physical health. Having anxiety, depression, or PTSD may change your appetite, cause fatigue, and a weakened immune system. Getting the mental health support you need can improve your physical health and enhance your body's ability to cope with the challenges of blood cancer and treatment.

### Better treatment outcomes

Research suggests that getting the mental health support you need alongside medical conditions, such as blood cancer, can improve the overall effectiveness of your cancer treatment – both your physical response to treatment, and your ability to follow treatment plans.

### Reduced risk of suicide

Depression, anxiety and PTSD are significant risk factors for suicide, so addressing the symptoms is crucial to ensure your safety and well-being. Seeking professional help can provide the necessary supports to help reduce your risk of self-harm.



**If you have any concerns about your mental health, please contact your doctor or your cancer healthcare team.**



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LYMPHOMA  
SOCIETY OF  
CANADA\*

**Never hesitate to contact us, we're here to help!**

1 833 222-4884 • [info@bloodcancers.ca](mailto:info@bloodcancers.ca) • [bloodcancers.ca](http://bloodcancers.ca)