

FACT SHEET 5

Most people say it's a shock when their doctor says they have cancer.

There are many reasons for this shock - the common view of cancer as a serious disease, not knowing what to expect, the fear of treatment and side effects, worrying about being a burden on your family, losing your job.

When you hear the word cancer, your mind will go completely blank. Normal reaction is to cry crying then you won't hear a word the doctor said after that. After a few days you will start to think more clearly again.

Common reactions

For many people the first few weeks after the diagnosis are very stressful. You may have trouble thinking, eating or sleeping. For most people tearfulness, and feelings of anger and guilt last from a few days to several weeks.

Common feelings include:

Fear: It's frightening to hear you have cancer. Most people feel better when they know what to expect. Learning about cancer and its treatment may help you cope better.

Anger: It's normal to ask 'why me?' and be angry with family and friends, the doctor and nurses looking after you, or God if you are religious. Anger is a natural reaction to the interruption that cancer has caused to your life plans. If you feel angry, talk to your family or friends. Most of the time, talking will help you feel better.

Guilt: You may blame yourself for getting cancer. The causes of cancer are usually unknown. Feeling guilty will not help you to get better. Counselling and support groups can help you deal with feelings of guilt if you find it hard to get rid of these feelings.

Denial: You may have trouble believing or accepting the news that you have cancer. Denial can be helpful by giving people time to adjust to their diagnosis. If denial stops you from getting treatment it becomes a problem. Counselling

and support groups can help you face your diagnosis and treatment.

Sadness or depression: Many people with cancer feel sad or depressed. Depression can be treated. Your doctor can prescribe medication or suggest you talk about your feelings to a counsellor. Joining a support group with others who have cancer may also be helpful.

Loneliness: You may feel lonely or distant from others. Your family and friends may have trouble dealing with your cancer. You may feel too sick to enjoy your usual social activities. It's natural to feel that nobody understands what you're going through. Joining a support group and talking with others who are facing the same problems may help you feel less lonely.

Loss of control: Being told you have cancer can make you feel you have lost control of your life. Finding out about the cancer and its treatment, and how best to look after yourself, can help give you back some feeling of control. Talking to other people who have cancer may also be helpful.

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 relieved to make life more comfortable.

Often the first thing people ask about having cancer is, 'Am I going to die?' Talk to your doctor about what the diagnosis means for you and what the future may hold. You may find that knowing more about your illness helps ease the fear. What you hope for may also change as treatment progresses.

If you need someone to talk to, give Trans-Help a call. They can assist you in finding a support group in your area, be there for someone to talk to, 24/7 and also be there to talk to family members who are not coping with the diagnosis.