

BMDA Distress

Distress is a reaction to stress that leads to unpleasant emotions and feelings. Things that are difficult to cope with can cause distress. It can affect your daily activities and lead to anxiety, changes in sleep, distraction, lack of appetite, or mental illness.

Distress is normal and everyone experiences it at some point. Sometimes it is related to family, work, finances or even health concerns. However, high levels of distress can have health consequences. Many people with cancer report feeling anxiety about:

- Appointments
- Treatment side effects
- Family
- Talking to young children about cancer
- Money and finances
- Being away from home
- Employment
- The future

It is also normal for caregivers and loved ones to feel distress.

Managing Distress

There are several things you can do to manage distress. You may need to try different things before you find what works for you. Below are some suggestions to try.

Think about what things helped you cope with hard times in the past. Try them again.

Possible activities include:

- Exercise
- Write in a journal
- Take a bath
- Read
- Listen to music or a podcast
- Learn something new
- Intimacy

Find support. This may include:

- Counseling with a mental health provider
- Talking with a loved one, friend or spiritual mentor
- Finding a support group
- Signing up for a peer-to-peer support program
- Meditation

Patient Education

Look into services and programs at the hospital. Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center provides several services to help with emotional distress. Ask your care team about:

- Counseling
- Spiritual support
- Support groups
- Art classes
- Massage therapy
- Yoga

When to Ask for Help

Be aware of any signs that are more serious. These include:

- Feeling sad or hopeless several days each week
- Having little or no interest in things you used to enjoy
- Having thoughts about harming yourself

If you have these symptoms, talk with your health care team right away.

If you have thoughts of suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255. You can also call 911 or visit the nearest hospital emergency center.

Resources

Your physical and emotional health is important. To learn more or to get additional support, contact Social Work at 904-202-7300. Your doctor or nurse can also connect you with a social work counselor.