

Supporting Your Mental Wellness



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

MDAnderson
Cancer Center

Making Cancer History

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Supporting Your Mental Wellness

The stress and challenges of a cancer diagnosis can impact your overall mental wellness. If you feel stressed and overwhelmed, you may be experiencing distress. Everyone experiences distress at some point. Sometimes it is related to family, work, finances or health concerns. It is common for patients, caregivers and loved ones to feel distress when dealing with a cancer diagnosis.

While some amount of distress is manageable, high levels of distress may negatively affect your daily activities and cause changes in mood, sleep and appetite.

Many people with cancer report feeling distressed about:

- Their diagnosis.
- Medical tests and scans.
- Treatment side effects.
- Talking to young children about cancer.
- Money and finances.
- Being away from home.
- Employment.
- Uncertainty about the future.



Distress Screening

Your care team will screen you for distress. It is important to talk with your care team when you are experiencing high levels of distress. This helps your team understand what challenges you are facing and what services or support might be helpful for you.

Managing Your Mental Wellness

There are many things you can do to manage your mental wellness. Try different things to find what works for you.

Below are some suggestions.

- Think about what has helped you cope with hard times in the past. Try them again.
- You may also:
 - Exercise.
 - Write in a journal.
 - Take a relaxing bath.
 - Read.
 - Listen to music or a podcast.
 - Learn something new.
- Find support. You can:
 - Meet with a mental health professional.
 - Talk with a loved one, friend or spiritual advisor.
 - Find a support group.



When to Ask for Help

Be aware of serious signs of distress. These include:

- Feeling sad or hopeless several days each week.
- Little or no interest in things you used to enjoy.
- Thoughts about harming yourself.
- Racing thoughts that disrupt your sleep or daily activities.
- Always feeling fearful or overwhelmed.
- Being unable to cope with pain, tiredness or nausea.

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

If you have thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. You can also call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency center right away.

Professional Mental Health Services

You do not have to manage your mental distress alone. MD Anderson offers mental health and counseling services to support you and your loved ones' mental wellness.

Mental Health Counseling

Counseling may help you and your family cope with challenges related to a cancer diagnosis, treatment, side effects, survivorship and end of life. Counseling may be provided by a mental health professional with a master's degree in a mental health field or a doctoral degree in psychology.

Psychiatry

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor that treats emotional and mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression and other issues related to a cancer diagnosis. Psychiatrists can prescribe medicine and may also provide counseling.

Neuropsychology

Neuropsychology services are provided by a neuropsychologist who specializes in cancer-related thinking and memory problems or "chemo brain." Services may include testing, counseling and support to lessen the impact of brain changes on daily life.

Paying for Mental Health Services

If you have insurance:

Check your policy by calling the number on your insurance card. Ask about mental health benefits. Insurance companies may also use the term “behavioral health” for mental health services and counseling.

Consider asking your insurance company these questions about your policy:

- What type of mental health services are covered?
- Is a physician referral required to see a mental health professional?
- Does the mental health professional need to be in-network?
- Is MD Anderson considered in-network with my policy?
- What is the difference in my copay amounts for in-network versus out-of-network mental health professionals?
- Does the policy require a specific diagnosis to cover mental health services?

MD Anderson’s Financial Clearance Center (FCC) can answer your questions about insurance coverage and what you might have to pay. Call 844-294-4322 to talk with a financial counselor.

If you do not have insurance:

- You can pay for the services out of pocket.
- Talk to MD Anderson’s social work counselors free of charge.
- If you are a Texas resident with a certain financial status, you may be eligible for MD Anderson’s Financial Assistance Program. Call 844-294-4322 to talk with an MD Anderson financial counselor.



Support Groups

A cancer support group is a gathering of people affected by cancer including patients, caregivers, family members or friends. Support groups provide a safe and supportive place to share your experiences, emotions and challenges related to cancer.

According to the National Cancer Institute, cancer support groups can:

- Help you feel better, more hopeful and not so alone.
- Give you a chance to talk about your feelings and process through them.
- Support you in managing practical concerns such as work or school.
- Offer a space to cope with side effects of treatment.



Choosing a Support Group

Before joining a support group, ask yourself if you are comfortable talking about personal issues with others and what you hope to gain by joining a group. A support group may not be right for everyone.

If you are thinking about joining a cancer support group, here are some questions to ask the group's contact person:

- How large is the group?
- Who attends (survivors, family members, types of cancer, age range)?
- How long are the meetings?
- How often does the group meet?
- How long has the group been together?
- Who leads the meetings - a professional or a survivor?
- What is the format of the meetings?
- Is the main purpose to share feelings, or do people also offer tips to solve common problems?
- If I go, can I just sit and listen?



Types of Support Groups

In Person

In-person support groups are available at MD Anderson. Your social work counselor can also help you look for in-person support groups near your home.

Virtual

MD Anderson offers virtual support groups run by social work counselors and other staff. These sessions provide an opportunity for patients, family members and friends to meet others going through similar challenges, develop new relationships and learn how others cope.

Learn more about MD Anderson's support groups at MDAnderson.org/SupportGroups.

Community Resources

Cancer retreats, online groups or individual referral programs offer support in a less formal setting. These programs help you to connect with others who may understand what you or your family are going through. These programs can be based on diagnosis, location, treatment or other reasons.

Ask your social work counselor about which resource may be the best fit for you.

MD Anderson Resources

Patient Support

You can contact these services directly. No referral is needed

Arts in Medicine

713-792-5192

Pediatric patients can participate in painting, pottery, yoga, music therapy and more through the Arts in Medicine program. Music, theatre, dance and photography are also offered.

Art Space for Patients and Caregivers

Main Building, Floor 2, near Elevator D

Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

No art experience is necessary to visit the Art Space.

Patients and caregivers can enjoy instructor-led classes, self-directed art or virtual tutorials. Supplies provided.

myCancerConnection

[MDAnderson.org/MyCancerConnection](https://www.mdanderson.org/MyCancerConnection)

1-800-345-6324

myCancerConnection is MD Anderson's support community of trained survivor and caregiver volunteers. You or your caregiver will be matched with a volunteer who can relate to your cancer diagnosis, treatment or family experience. The meetings can be in-person or by phone.

Social Work

[MDAnderson.org/SocialWork](https://www.mdanderson.org/SocialWork)

713-792-6195

Clinical social work counselors help patients and caregivers cope with the impact of a cancer diagnosis. Social work services are free and can be provided in-person or over the phone.

Spiritual Care and Education

[MDAnderson.org/SpiritualSupport](https://www.mdanderson.org/SpiritualSupport)

713-792-7184

Chaplains help patients, caregivers and family members from all faith communities to improve their quality of life through spiritual well-being. Worship services, intercessory prayers, sacramental ministry and in-person spiritual support are available. The chapels and prayer rooms are open to anyone seeking peace through prayer and meditation.

Clinical Services: Referral Needed

Talk to your care team if you are interested in a referral to these services at MD Anderson.

Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program

[MDAnderson.org/AYA](https://www.mdanderson.org/AYA)

The AYA Program offers education and support for young adult patients ages 15 through 39+. Young adults can connect with their peers through support groups and social events. The AYA program offers support for coping, relationships, fertility, school, work, long-term health and quality of life goals.

Child, Adolescent and Young Life Services

Child life specialists work with children and families to help them cope with the challenges of hospitalization, illness and disability. They provide children with age-appropriate preparation and support for procedures, pain management and coping strategies.

Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology and Neuropsychology

Clinical psychology services address emotional adjustment through treatment and recovery. Neuropsychology services focus on changes in thinking that affect daily life, school and work.

Integrative Medicine Center [MDAnderson.org/IntegrativeMedCenter](https://www.mdaanderson.org/IntegrativeMedCenter)

This center provides therapies to improve mental health. They offer virtual and in-person therapies such as massage, music therapy and health psychology. Group classes in expressive writing, yoga, breath work and more, are also available.

Neuropsychology

The neuropsychology team helps patients who are experiencing cognitive changes (chemo brain) such as memory loss or trouble with paying attention. Services may include a clinical assessment to determine a treatment plan to improve brain function.

 **This icon indicated services for pediatric and young adult patients.**

Pain Management Center

[MDAnderson.org/PainManagementCenter](https://www.mdananderson.org/PainManagementCenter)

The Pain Management Center offers different pain management therapies. There is also a pain psychologist to help patients cope with chronic pain or opioid use.

Psychiatric Oncology Center

[MDAnderson.org/PsychiatricOncologyCenter](https://www.mdananderson.org/PsychiatricOncologyCenter)

Psychiatrists can support you with coping with the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis and treatment, sexual dysfunction or drug and alcohol dependence. Services include medicine management and psychotherapy.

Supportive Care Center

[MDAnderson.org/SupportiveCare](https://www.mdananderson.org/SupportiveCare)

The Supportive Care Center focuses on symptom management, emotional distress and improving quality of life. Team members include doctors, advance care providers, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, counselors, chaplains and social work counselors.

The Learning Center

[MDAnderson.org/TLC](https://www.mdananderson.org/TLC)

Visit the patient library to access resources to support your mental wellness. You can check out books and audio tapes on coping, exercise, nutrition and mindfulness. Brochures and magazines are also available free of charge.

For a complete list of MD Anderson's services, ask your care team for the Resources and Services guide or view online at bit.ly/ResourcesGuide [MDAnderson](https://www.mdananderson.org).

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