

# Loss and grief



Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of something significant. This could be the loss of your health, or of a particular role, status, goal or person. Grieving can encompass a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions.

Often the extent of grief reflects the extent to which you valued that part of your life. However, people grieve very differently and the ways in which two people respond to the same event may vary significantly.

There are many elements of the cancer journey that can cause feelings of loss and grief. These may include loss of:

- |                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| energy                           | routines                      |
| part of your body or function    | sense of identity             |
| physical comfort                 | roles (e.g. main breadwinner) |
| sense of control or independence | relationships                 |
| sense of security in your health | financial security            |
| future goals or ambitions        | work opportunities            |

Grief often endures after treatment has ended and may be present for a large proportion of the time or triggered by certain events (e.g. medical appointments, special family occasions, hearing of others affected by cancer).

While most feelings of grief dissipate with time, one of the best ways to speed up this process is to talk to others about what you are feeling. Sometimes people affected by cancer find this difficult, because they believe that others will think they should be grateful to be alive, or that when their treatment has finished they should be able to “get over it”.

It can also be difficult because some people aren't familiar or comfortable with talking about grief and dealing with the feelings that come with it. However, remember that **expressing this grief is likely to help you to understand, accept and adjust to your losses**. It's worth persevering even if the first person you speak to doesn't respond the way you had expected or hoped.

If you find that this is too difficult to do and that grief is enduring and interfering with your quality of life, consider speaking to your specialist, GP, or a counsellor or psychologist who is trained to provide strategies to help you with the necessary adjustment. When grief is not resolved it can lead to depression, so seeking help early is important.

## The following strategies may also help:

- Put aside some time each day to quietly reflect and fully experience your emotions.

- ☑ Allow yourself to cry.
- ☑ Keep a diary of what you're thinking and how you're feeling. Having a record of this journey may be interesting to look back on and examine your progress.
- ☑ Make the effort to see some close friends or family – it's likely to improve your mood.
- ☑ Avoid making important, major decisions soon after your loss.
- ☑ Seek professional help with things as varied as finances, jobs around the house, or coping emotionally – you don't need to do all of this alone.
- ☑ Learning [relaxation](#), [scheduling activities that are consistent with your values](#) and [problem solving](#) may also be useful strategies to help you cope.