

36. Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness or isolation are common experiences among people with cancer. A recent UK study found that one in seven people who had recently finished cancer treatment had been distressed by feelings of loneliness or isolation. Loneliness can mean different things to different people but is usually defined as feelings of emptiness and social isolation. It is possible to feel lonely and isolated even when there are many people around. Often, the loneliness is caused by a feeling that one is going through the experience of cancer alone and that no one else can fully

understand the experience. Contact with previous patients can sometimes help. For other people, loneliness is due to not having the support of family or friends nearby or at all.

The disease itself, the treatment or the time taken up with hospital visits may physically prevent people from socialising as they once did, though there are a variety of emotional or psychological reasons that may also make people not feel like socialising. Loneliness is an extremely personal experience that does not always relate directly to the amount of support people are offered.

The main consideration seems to be whether or not a person has someone in whom they can confide. Sometimes patients feel that other people are too distressed themselves, too vulnerable or otherwise not appropriate to be a reliable source of support. On the other hand, some patients hate the thought of feeling 'a burden' on others and consequently fail to make use of the support that *is* available to them.

How can I manage these feelings?

- Loneliness and isolation are common feelings among people with cancer so you are certainly not alone in feeling this way. It is certainly nothing to be embarrassed about.
- Consider whether (a) you are generally socially isolated (literally on your own for long periods of time without the opportunity to have contact with others), (b) you have become socially withdrawn in recent weeks or months, or (c) you are not using the support that is available to you.
- It may be helpful to join a support group where you can meet people who may be experiencing similar problems to yourself. Of course this takes courage but confidence in anything only comes from actually doing the thing in question. You can find out about this and more at the Fern Centre, North Devon District Hospital—details of this and the Macmillan helpline is on the resources sheet attached to this info sheet. If you have become socially withdrawn recently, consider whether you might be depressed as well.
- If emotional support is available (for example partner, family or friends) what makes it difficult to use these possible supports?
- Is everyone else forcing you to be positive at all times?

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continued

- If emotional support is available (for example partner, family or friends) what makes it difficult to use these possible supports? Is everyone else forcing you to be positive at all times? Do you worry that by talking about your concerns you will be causing distress to people you care about?
- Have you tried saying that you find it hard to talk?
- What solutions have you thought about for resolving your loneliness?
- How might you become more engaged with the world around you?
- What support do you need in becoming more involved?
- Several counselling services are available offering free, confidential sessions, to anyone affected by a cancer diagnosis. You do not always need a doctor's referral. See local and national resources below.
- Loneliness can sometimes be a feature of other aspects of on-going cancer treatment such as:
 - Feeling sad or depressed
 - Concern about your appearance
 - Difficulty making plans
 - Mobility problems
 - Fatigue or pain
 - Relationship with your partner, children, family or friends

Local Resources:

<p>Counselling Service The Fern Centre North Devon District Hospital Web: https://overandabove.org.uk/fern-centre/</p>	<p>Jess French, Lead Macmillan Cancer care Counsellor Tel: 01271 334472 (ext. 5672) Email: ndht.cancercarecounselling@nhs.net Self-referral or through your CNS or keyworker</p>
<p>HOPE programme — self-management course for cancer patients over 6 consecutive weekly sessions, each of 2.5hrs</p>	<p>Jess French contact as above or use the self-referral form on the Fern Centre website—see above</p>
<p>The Fern Centre, North Devon District Hospital Tel: 01271 311855 Email address: ndht.theferncentre@nhs.net Website https://overandabove.org.uk/fern-centre/</p>	<p>Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefit advice., plusSupport, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers. Support groups and complimentary therapies available.</p>

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

36. Loneliness and Isolation - Resources/Information

National Resources:

<p>Age UK Devon—1 Manaton Court, Matford Business Park Exeter EX2 8PF Tel : 0333 241 2340 Email: info@sgeukdevon.co.uk</p> <p>Age UK Mid Devon—Haven Centre, Broad Lane, Tiverton EX16 5HE Tel: 01884 255369/242052 Email: enquiries@ageukmiddevon.org.uk</p>	<p>Provide a range of services to meet the needs of older people and/or their carers, particularly those living in rural areas of the county.</p> <p>Our mission, ‘To help people in Devon enjoy later life’, is achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling people to make choices about their own lives • Helping them to influence and have a voice in the society in which they live • Providing excellent support to stay independent • Providing services that meet identified need • Promoting financial security to end poverty • Challenging attitudes, policies and practices.
<p>NHS Website</p>	<p>Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — Monday – Friday 9am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Macmillan on-line Community</p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>
<p>Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/</p>	<p>When people feel listened to, it can save a life ‘, confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair Tel: 116 123(free 24hr helpline)</p>

Other Resources :

<p>Macmillan Booklets:</p>	<p>Managing the symptoms of cancer MAC11671</p>
	<p>How are you feeling? PDF— MAC11593_E05_N</p>
	<p>Understanding chemotherapy MAC11619_E15</p>
	<p>Understanding radiotherapy PDF— MAC11640_E12_N</p>