

45. Loss of Faith or Other Spiritual Concerns

Most people have deeply held beliefs or convictions about their existence. These include assumptions about the existence of supernatural forces, the meaning of one's life, the nature of the world at large, and what happens after we die. Some of these beliefs are formally embodied in spiritual faiths such as religions but this is not true for everyone.

A diagnosis of cancer can force people to consider their mortality and inevitably brings with it many fundamental issues relating to one's religious faith or personal beliefs. Such questions like "*Why me?*" or "*What did I do to deserve this?*" can often lead to spiritual or religious doubt, or for the patient to morally scrutinise their own past actions, e.g. previous relationships, smoking, lifestyle choices etc. Catastrophic events like cancer can leave people feeling lost in a spiritual sea without reference points – it can take time to adjust one's internal picture of the world to be able to make sense of what is apparently unfair and meaningless. This loss of existential meaning leads individuals to ask themselves "*What is the point?*" suggesting that they question the futility of struggling with the physical and psychological suffering associated with cancer. This loss of spiritual meaning, or existential despair, may be a precursor to depression.

How can I manage my feelings?

- It is important that you inform the health care workers of your faith and whether you have specific needs related to your religion.
- If you have an established religion, is there a particular member of your religious community that you feel you could talk to?
- You may prefer to share your beliefs and experiences with a partner, close friend or nurse.
- Most hospitals have a chaplaincy department which can offer spiritual care, whatever your faith or spiritual tradition, including those who do not have any particular affiliation.

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care Chaplain service is available to offer support when feelings of uncertainty and worry are uppermost</p>	<p>Pastoral Care Team: 01752 792313 Contact can be made through the Mustard Tree staff: 01752 430060</p>
<p>Livewell South West: Panic This workshop aims to break down some of the myths surrounding panic and help you to manage your panic attacks.</p> <p>Mindfulness Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life's pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p> <p>Managing Anxiety This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological and physical symptoms of anxiety and strategies to manage this including breathing, goal setting and cognitive behaviour therapy</p> <p>Managing Low Mood This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological symptoms of low mood as well as providing strategies to manage this</p> <p>Managing Stress This one hour workshop introduces the symptoms of stress and how the body responds, and provides simple strategies to manage this</p> <p>Sleep Feel, Feel Well Introduces ways to support restful sleep</p>	<p>Livewell South West: To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p>Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers</p>	<p>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935</p>
<p>Other Resources</p>	<p>Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.</p>

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.</p>	<p>www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)</p>

Further Information:

<p>Macmillan booklets: – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre</p>
<p>Talking about your cancer</p>
<p>How are you feeling?</p>