

Managing Depression for Caregivers

It is common for caregivers to experience depression, especially when facing ongoing stress, emotional strain, and changes to daily life.

What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad. It is a persistent low mood or loss of interest in activities that can affect how you think, feel, and function in daily life.

Common causes of depression for caregivers

Caring for a loved one with cancer can be emotionally and physically demanding. Depression can develop over time due to:

- Feeling overwhelmed by caregiving responsibilities
- Ongoing stress, exhaustion, or lack of sleep
- Having little time for yourself
- Feeling a loss of control over your life or routine
- Worry about your loved one's health and future
- Navigating difficult emotions such as guilt, sadness, or frustration
- Feeling isolated or lacking support
- No longer engaging in activities you once enjoyed

Signs and symptoms of depression

Depression can affect both your emotional and physical well-being. You may notice:

- Feeling sad, down, or hopeless
- Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Fatigue or low energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Feeling overwhelmed or emotionally numb
- Increased irritability or anxiety

If these symptoms are persistent or interfering with your daily life, it may be helpful to seek additional support.

Ways to manage depression

- Take small steps each day: when you're feeling low, even simple tasks can feel overwhelming. Focus on small, manageable steps rather than trying to do everything at once.
- Make time for yourself: it can be difficult to prioritize your own needs, but your well-being matters. Even short breaks can help improve your mood and energy.
- Stay connected: depression can make it tempting to withdraw from others, but staying connected to friends, family, or other caregivers can provide important emotional support.
- Ask for help and accept it: you don't have to manage everything on your own. Accepting help with daily tasks can reduce stress and give you time to recharge.
- Check in with yourself: pay attention to how you're feeling. Writing things down, talking with someone you trust, or simply acknowledging your emotions can help you process them.
- Move your body when you can: light activity, like walking or getting fresh air, can help improve mood and increase energy levels.
- Create a simply routine: having some structure to your day, even small routines, can help you feel more grounded and in control.
- Be patient with yourself: caregiving is demanding and it is normal to have difficult days. Try to treat yourself with the same compassion you offer others.
- Seek additional support if needed: if depression is affecting your daily life, consider speaking with a healthcare provider or mental health professional. Support groups and counseling can also be helpful.

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, it is important to seek immediate help by contacting a healthcare provider or calling Crisis Services at 716-834-3131 or calling/texting 988.