Coping with Cancer

Cancer is difficult to cope with, both if you have it, and if one your close friends or relatives does. It’s important to remember that there’s no right or wrong way to feel, and even if your experience differs from anybody else’s, it does not mean you’re being cowardly, insufficiently/excessively sensitive, just that you’re dealing with it in a different way to how others may be.

Emotions upon diagnosis

This is an emotional time, and oddly enough, not all the emotions it will bring up are bad. Certainly there is often fear – the C-word is obviously a bit of a bombshell at the best of times – but also confusion, anger, and also relief. For some, knowing is much better than not knowing, and now that there is an actual diagnosis, it’s likely progress can be made towards treatment or care. Prepare also for a bit of an emotional rollercoaster – one day’s emotions might well be very different from the next.

Emotions during and after treatment

Understandably, treatment often brings on negative emotions, and brings up questions. Will I ever feel happy again? Am I going to die? Why has this happened to me? Will I be able to get myself together and enjoy the things I used to? Friends and family may also expect you to be back to normal after treatment but you may find this is where you need the most support of all. Having negative feelings can be very draining for you and the people around you. You might find that family and friends don’t understand, or might try to tell you what to feel. Beware this can put a big strain on your close relationships.

Asking for help

Don’t feel you are being weak by asking for help or letting someone know how awful you feel. It is not a weakness. Talking about how you feel is more likely to help you and the people around you than staying silent.

Doctors and nurses in cancer care are very aware of the range of reactions people can have to cancer. There may also be counsellors or psychologists in the cancer team at your centre. They can help you through difficult, emotional times after your diagnosis, during treatment and afterwards. They will be ready to listen to you, give you support, and suggest ways to help you feel more positive about things.