

Isolation



“It’s the first emotion: OK, I’ll be alone. Even if it’s not true because my family was there. But at a certain point, it’s you and the sickness. People around you may be there, but it’s you who has to choose how you want to live with this illness.”

Sylvain
Diagnosed with prostate cancer

How does this affect me?

Many people with cancer experience feelings of isolation. You might notice that some of your loved ones don’t reach out as much as they used to. You might also start to feel too sick to work or enjoy activities. Even when you’re with family or friends, it may seem like they can’t understand what you are going through or don’t want to talk about your illness. As a result, you may feel alone, lonely or isolated as you go through treatment, which is completely normal.



What can I do to feel less isolated?



Accept social invitations

- Friends may invite you to dinner, or to have a cup of coffee. It may feel like an effort but try accepting an invitation. It may feel good to talk to a friend
- Let others introduce you to new activities sometimes – this could be a new board game, reading group, or a new physical activity. It might feel like the last thing you want to do, but you might enjoy yourself more than you think.



Schedule social and pleasant activities during your week

If you are a social person spending too much time alone can make you feel disconnected from the world. Connecting with others can increase your wellbeing and motivation to take part in enjoyable activities.

You may wish to...

- Aim for three or four social experiences and pleasant activities each week. These could be coffee with a friend or community centre activities like yoga classes or walking groups. Be flexible with scheduling in case something unexpected comes up in your treatment or schedule.
- If things don't go according to plan one day, try to re-schedule before the day ends or look forward to trying it the next day.



Build your support circle

- Identify people in your life who can help you with practical and/or emotional needs. Sometimes family members are a good choice, but you might also connect with people who are less close to you. Sometimes a family members' concern for you makes it hard for them to provide support.
- Choose support people who suit you – this might depend on personality, skills, level of empathy or their availability.
- Involvement in a cancer-specific support group also can help remind you that you're not alone, and gives you a place to talk about concerns related to what you're experiencing.
- For more information, see [Getting Support](#).



Enjoy yourself

- Do more of what you enjoy! Make a list of all the activities that make you happy and try to fit an activity in your daily routine as often as possible.
- You may wish to invite someone to join you to go for a walk or watch a movie. Don't be discouraged if you don't enjoy doing something as much as you used to. If you keep at it, the pleasure you used to experience can eventually return.



What help do I need?

Put it in writing

Make a list of ways that your friends and family can help you feel less isolated. People are often happy to help, but they don't know how. Some examples of things they could do with you are:

- Talk with you about your concerns about cancer and your treatment without trying to “solve” anything.
- Do something relaxing with you without focussing on your concerns. This could include: working together on a puzzle or crossword, cooking a favourite dish, playing a card game, or watching a movie.
- Call you up for a phone conversation just to “catch up”.
- Be company for you at your appointments.
- Reconnect to old or new hobbies that eventually can put you in contact with other people that have the same interest.

Seek help sooner, rather than later

When you've spent a lot of time alone, it can be hard to bounce back. You may start to feel disconnected from the world. Try reaching out to any of the resources listed here and these connections can create other opportunities for participating in enjoyable activities!



Where can I find help?

Your healthcare team

If you would like help coping with your feelings of loneliness or isolation, ask your healthcare team for advice. They can refer you to services and specialists in your cancer clinic or your area. This can include professionals such as counsellors, social workers and psychologists. For more information see [Talking to Your Healthcare Professional About Your Symptoms or Concerns](#).

Support groups

Support groups can be a helpful way to connect with people who understand what you are going through, and who you can share your feelings with.

One-on-one support

- You may be more comfortable speaking to someone one-on-one. Try reaching out to someone you know who has or had cancer for support. They can share understanding of your experience. If you don't know anyone, maybe a friend or family member can connect you with someone.
- The Canadian Cancer Society offers a peer support service, where they match you with someone who's had similar cancer experiences. Visit [CancerConnection.ca](https://www.cancerconnection.ca) or call 1-888-939-3333.



Online support and social networking

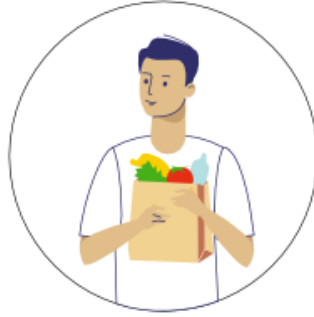
Many people with cancer join online communities for support. These can include message boards, private Facebook groups and other places to share experiences and build relationships without having to leave home. If you are interested in joining an online discussion group, check out [CancerConnection.ca](https://www.cancerconnection.ca).



Quebec Cancer Foundation

The Foundation provides a [resource directory](#) where you can search for organizations near you that offer a variety of services, including home help, lodging, transportation, and other supportive resources.

For more information see [Getting support](#).



What can I do to look after myself?

Taking care of the basics that contribute to good health—and that also help relieve a lot of treatment side effects—will make it easier for you to have the mental and physical energy to try things that could help you manage your feelings of isolation.

Eat well

Eating a variety of foods and well-balanced meals can help you feel better. Healthy food can help you avoid mood swings and depression.

- Eat regularly and limit junk food (sugary, fatty, and processed foods).
- Drink plenty of fluids. Avoid alcohol.
- If your cancer symptoms get in the way of healthy eating, ask for help from a dietician.
- Protein can help your body heal and maintain a healthy immune system. Protein is found in fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, dried beans, lean red meat.
- Check with your healthcare team to find out if there are any foods or beverages that you should not eat or drink because of your cancer or treatment.



Move your body

Even small amounts of exercise release endorphins, which boost your mood and decrease pain.

- It is generally fine to exercise during treatment, but check with your healthcare team before starting any exercise.
- Physical activity can improve your sleep and appetite and lessen treatment side-effects like nausea and fatigue.
- Choose an activity or exercise that you enjoy doing or would like to try, and that you can fit into your schedule without too much difficulty.



Get some sleep

Getting a good night's rest can help reduce fatigue and improve your energy levels. You may then find it easier to think about, and plan some social activities.

- Develop a sleep routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. If you do take a nap during the day, try to limit it to 20-30 minutes.
- If you are having trouble sleeping, try doing an activity that you know relaxes you, such as listening to music, reading or meditating before going to bed.
- Avoid caffeine and sugary drinks in the evening.
- It's recommended that you turn off computers and tablets at least one hour before you plan to go to bed—the bright screens of these devices can trick your brain into thinking it's daytime and make it hard to sleep.

For more information see [Looking After Yourself](#).

Resources

For more information on isolation, self-management strategies and support organizations, check out the resources below.

[Canadian Cancer Society - Support groups in Quebec](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society - Emotions](#)

Acknowledgement of sources

The content of this document has been adapted from the following sources:

- Coping When You Have Cancer. Canadian Cancer Society 2017.
- Dealing With Stress and Worry. Coping Together 2013.
- Build Your Support System. Princess Margaret Cancer Centre 2020.
- Feeling Sad, Lonely or Depressed. TEMPO 2018.

Healthcare professional endorsement

The content of this document has been reviewed and approved by a team of healthcare professionals and clinical experts.

Disclaimer

Please note that this fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare professional. If you have questions about your health, or any medical issue, you should contact a healthcare professional right away. You should not delay seeking medical advice, or disregard professional medical advice, because of information in this fact sheet. Before beginning any health treatment, always consult your doctor. All care has been taken to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate at the time of publication. e-IMPAQc is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of, or related to, any use of the fact sheet, or because of any errors or omissions.

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