

to
my
soul

The Shock of Diagnosis & Initial Reac- -tions



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ENGAGE
ESGO | European Network of Gynaecological
Cancer Advocacy Groups

01

UNDER-
STANDING
YOUR INITIAL
REACTIONS

A cancer diagnosis usually comes with a range of intense emotions. You may **experience disbelief** or **detachment**,

especially if there were no obvious symptoms before. **Fear** and anxiety are common, **understandable**, and normal, as are worries about treatment, survival, and what the **future** holds.

You may feel shock, anger, sadness, frustration, guilt, or even completely emotionless and empty. All responses are valid, natural, and part of the process. Understand that you're not alone in these feelings. Everyone reacts differently, and your emotions may fluctuate during this time. It's important to be kind to yourself, allowing space and time for your feelings and the healing process.

| am scared.

02

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

Emotions and physical symptoms are deeply connected, and both may vary as you process a cancer diagnosis. Emotional reactions like sadness or anxiety can lead to physical responses such as **fatigue, sleep issues, changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating, and/or physical pain.** These reactions **are natural and temporary**, reflecting how stress impacts both your mind and body.



UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS CONNECTION EXISTS CAN HELP YOU NAVIGATE THESE CHALLENGES WITH SELF-COMPASSION.

Future?

02

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

natural reactions!

Fatigue

This is often one of the most common physical symptoms. Your body is processing an immense amount of information and emotion, which can leave you feeling constantly tired, even after a full night of sleep. It's important to listen to your body and rest when needed.

Sleep Disruptions

Whether you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early, your sleep patterns may change. Anxiety and stress can affect your sleep, making it harder to relax. Establishing a bedtime routine, limiting your caffeine intake, employing relaxation techniques, and engaging in regular physical activity (such as walking or gentle exercise that increases your heartbeat) can help improve sleep.

Changes in Appetite

Some people experience a loss of appetite, while others may find themselves eating more than usual. Stress, anxiety, and even the physical effects of

cancer treatment can alter your hunger signals. Try to focus on nourishing foods, even in small amounts, and stay hydrated. Also be aware of emotional binge eating, which can become another issue that needs addressing.

Difficulty Concentrating ("Brain Fog")

Many patients report feeling mentally unclear, having difficulty concentrating, or being forgetful. This is often a result of the stress and emotional strain caused by the diagnosis. Journaling, making lists, or setting reminders can help manage this temporary challenge.

Physical Aches and Pains

Emotional stress can also manifest physically in the form of muscle tension, headaches, or digestive issues. Gentle movement like stretching, yoga, and walking, as well as employing mindfulness or relaxation techniques, may alleviate some of this discomfort.

THESE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS ARE USUALLY TEMPORARY AND PART OF THE BODY'S NATURAL REACTION TO STRESS. AS YOU BEGIN TO PROCESS YOUR DIAGNOSIS, YOUR BODY WILL GRADUALLY ADJUST, AND THESE SYMPTOMS WILL OFTEN LESSEN OVER TIME. IT'S IMPORTANT TO PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION AND NOT BE HARD ON YOURSELF FOR EXPERIENCING THESE CHALLENGES.



express emotions

03



EARLY
COPING
STRATEGIES

Adopting effective coping strategies early on can help you better manage the emotional and physical challenges that come with a cancer diagnosis.

Allow Time for Adjustment

It's important to be **patient** with yourself. You don't need to have all the answers right away. Allow yourself the time to process your feelings **without rushing** or feeling pressured. Adjusting to this new reality can take time. It might also be beneficial to set small, **manageable goals** to help navigate things at your own pace. Celebrating small milestones can make the process feel more achievable and empowering.

Express Your Emotions

It's completely normal if you're not ready to talk about your diagnosis right away. You can start by expressing your emotions in ways that feel comfortable, like journaling or art. These methods allow you to process your thoughts privately and **at your own pace**. When you feel ready, sharing with loved ones or joining a support group can also help you feel heard and less isolated. Remember, **there's no rush**—everyone's pathway is different, and it's okay to take small steps as you begin to open up.

Take Control with Information

Understanding your diagnosis empowers you. Start by focusing on where you are in your patient pathway. Concentrate on the current state and use resources like patient pathway guides to help navigate your care step by step. Write down questions, bring them to your appointments, and seek educational materials related to your current stage of treatment. It's okay to explore opportunities for the future, but avoid overwhelming yourself. If you feel overloaded with information, give yourself the space to focus on what feels manageable now. **Recording your doctor's consultations to review later can also support informed and confident decision-making.**

Practice Relaxation

Relaxation techniques are essential for managing stress. Try deep **breathing**, mindfulness, or gentle physical activities like yoga or walking. Practices like square breathing (inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4) are simple and effective ways to calm the mind and body. Additionally, mindfulness apps or sleep aids, such as guided **meditations** and white noise, can be excellent tools for enhancing relaxation. Popular apps like **Headspace** and **Calm** provide a wide range of resources designed to help manage stress, improve focus and promote overall mental well-being.

SEEKING
PROFESSIONAL
EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT
IS A STRENGTH

04



Receiving a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming, and it's completely normal to experience a wide range of emotions.

While it's important to acknowledge and accept these feelings, seeking help from a mental health professional can be a proactive and empowering step. A therapist or counsellor can provide tools to manage stress, fear, or uncertainty, helping you regain a sense of control during this vulnerable time. *Reaching out for emotional support doesn't mean you're weak—it's a sign of strength and self-care.* You don't have to face this alone, and professional guidance can offer relief, clarity, and strategies to navigate the challenges ahead.

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soul



05

have a plan!



PREPARING
FOR YOUR
FIRST
ONCOLOGY
APPOINTMENT

While this step can be overwhelming, having a **clear plan** can help ease your anxiety.

Start by writing down any questions you have about your diagnosis, potential treatments, and the steps ahead. It's a good idea to bring a trusted friend or family member along for emotional support, as having an extra set of ears can help you remember the details discussed. Don't hesitate to ask your doctor to explain anything that is unclear. **Taking an active role in your treatment will empower you and help you feel in greater control of your pathway.**



Affirmations

I am not alone. I allow myself to feel what I need to feel and take things one step at a time.

Each day, I am learning how to navigate this pathway at my own pace.

My emotions are valid, and it is okay to ask for help when I need it.

I am taking control of my path and am empowered to make decisions for my health.

I am deserving of love, support, and care from those around me.

My mind and body are working together to heal, and I will listen to both.

Each day brings new strength, and I am proud of how far I've come.