

# Dealing with Depression and Metastatic Breast Cancer



Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) is more than just a physical condition. Living with your diagnosis is life-altering, and there can be a heavy emotional burden. But you don't have to suffer through those feelings alone. You have a treatment team that is available to help and support you. This tip sheet will help you work with your treatment team to address/understand your feelings and get the help and support you need.



## TIP #1: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SADNESS AND DEPRESSION

- Depression and feeling sad are not the same thing. What you're experiencing might be depression if you:<sup>1</sup>
  - Are in a sad mood that doesn't go away for days at a time
  - Have lost interest in activities you used to enjoy
  - Are having trouble concentrating or feel nervous all the time
  - Can't sleep or are sleeping too much
  - Have thoughts of death or suicide
- If it's still hard to tell the difference, your treatment team can help you with this.
- People with MBC may not seek mental health services because they think it's an unavoidable part of having the disease.<sup>1</sup>
  - If you have feelings of sadness or depression that last more than a couple of days, bring it up with your treatment team as soon as possible.
  - It is important to address any feelings of sadness or depression, as these may be treatable with help from your treatment team.
  - If you have suicidal thoughts or feelings, seek immediate professional help by calling the National Suicidal Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or seeking care from a mental health professional, treatment facility, or your treatment team.



## TIP #2: DISCUSS THE CAUSE OF YOUR DEPRESSION

- Talk about the potential causes of your depression with your treatment team:
  - Depression and anxiety can be side effects of some breast cancer medicines, as well as some pain medicines.<sup>2</sup>
  - Some cancer treatments can also bring on early menopause, causing hormonal changes that can affect the brain.<sup>3</sup>
  - Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of cancer treatment, and may contribute to or be mistaken for depression.<sup>2</sup>
  - Depression can also stem from ongoing stress, worries about cancer or physiological reasons.<sup>2</sup>
- Depending on the source of your depression, your treatment team may consider a number of approaches, including:
  - Treatment of the depression through other medicines, talk therapy or counseling
  - Trying new medicines that do not cause depression as a side effect



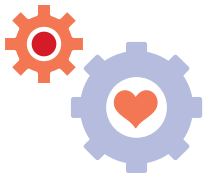
### TIP #3: TRY ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

- Aside from prescription medicines and counseling, there are other techniques for helping with depression:<sup>1</sup>
  - Journal writing
  - Massage
  - Meditation
  - Prayer, spiritual, or religious practices
  - Yoga



### TIP #4: MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Lifestyle changes can go a long way to improve your mood:<sup>1</sup>
  - Keep a regular sleep schedule. Being rested should help you feel better.
  - Get regular exercise, even if it's just a short walk. Exercising releases endorphins in the brain that ease depression.
  - If you are up to it, try a new activity, such as gardening, yoga, or volunteering.
  - Finding laughter can help – watch a favorite funny movie or tell old stories with family or friends.



### TIP #5: BUILD A SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Your treatment team may refer you to an oncology counselor that knows the stresses and emotions that come with cancer. Talking with a counselor or a support group who understands what you're going through can help you cope with your feelings.<sup>1</sup>
- Having people in your life to listen can also help with your mental health. Talk to your family and loved ones about what you're feeling.
- Remember that you're not alone. It may help to talk to someone – online or in person – going through a similar situation.
  - There are many groups that support people living with and affected by breast cancer, including Cancer Support Community, Living Beyond Breast Cancer, Metastatic Breast Cancer Network (MBCN), METAvivor, SHARE, Young Survival Coalition, and more.
  - There are also online sites with forums to talk with others such as breastcancer.org and Inspire Advanced Breast Cancer Community.
  - Consider searching online and reaching out to one of these groups for support.

#### References

1. American Cancer Society. Depression. Accessed June 2019. Available at: <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/changes-in-mood-or-thinking/depression.html>.
2. ASCO. Depression. Accessed June 2019. Available at: <https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/depression>.
3. Cleveland Clinic. Menopause: Emotional Aspects (Including Depression). Accessed July 2019. Available at: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15231-menopause-emotional-aspects-including-depression>. <https://www.lbbc.org/learn/types-breast-cancer/metastatic-breast-cancer/side-effects-and-metastatic-breast-cancer-2>.

