



Breast Cancer and Depression

The “Linked in Pink” campaign reminds us that we all have someone in our lives who has battled breast cancer. You, or someone you know, might be in treatment right now. As with other major illnesses, breast cancer can mess with a person’s emotions, bringing a sense of betrayal by your body, anxiety over the devastating changes in your life, worry about your family and community involvement, and uncertainty about the future. Facing these strong emotions can throw you or someone you love into grief and depression.

Depression is something that often goes unrecognized and untreated in people receiving breast cancer treatment. Do you experience sadness, or loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy? Has your weight changed, either up or down? Are you sleeping too much or too little? Do you feel exhausted? Worthless? Hopeless? Helpless? If you or someone you love is having any of these symptoms, or having thoughts of suicide or death, it’s important to talk to your doctor right away.

Diagnosing depression in someone undergoing treatment for breast cancer can be difficult. Symptoms of depression can be complicated by chemical or hormonal changes, and ovarian shutdown or removal. Discuss your concerns with your doctor, who can provide medications that will work in conjunction with your cancer treatment.

It’s important to recognize that your friends and family members are experiencing their own emotions related to your health condition. It’s good to have someone neutral to talk to, who can help you manage your thoughts and feelings. A therapist can teach you to use coping strategies, such as aromatherapy, guided imagery, journaling, massage, meditation, music, prayer. They may also refer you to a support group, where you can share your experience with other people who know exactly what you are going through.

Keeping a positive attitude when you are facing breast cancer diagnosis and treatment is essential. If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed, try the following:

- Set realistic goals about what you can accomplish each day.
- Remember that treatment is temporary, and you will eventually gain your energy back.
- Break large chores into smaller ones and pace yourself.
- Let yourself be with other people at least an hour a day.
- Keep your mind off your troubles by doing something you enjoy. Go to a movie or do volunteer work.
- Bolster your immune system by eating healthy foods. A nutritionist can design a plan for you.
- Avoid alcohol, which has a depressive effect on your system and will interfere with antidepressant medicine.
- Take walks for a boost of fresh air and sunshine, and invite a friend or family member along for company.

For someone experiencing breast cancer, paying attention to mental wellness is just as important as working toward physical wellness. For more information about managing the emotions that go with breast cancer, call Southeast Health Group at 1-800-511-5446.