

## **Spirituality & faith**

Spirituality is what a person does in his or her life that helps them to fulfil their innermost human desires. It can be defined as one's sense of peace, purpose, connection to others and beliefs about the meaning of life. For believers of a religion, spirituality may be found or expressed through their religion.



### ***Cancer & spirituality***

When a person receives his or her cancer diagnosis, questions such as “why me?” or “what did I do that caused this to happen to me?” often comes to mind. Having cancer (or any other serious illness) can make you question the meaning of your life, illness and suffering. It can shake your beliefs, faith and values, and affect your relationship with others. While this causes some people to reflect and think about what is important to them, others may feel overwhelmed and distressed, making it harder for them to cope with cancer and its treatment. Other problems you may experience can include:

- Feeling angry about the diagnosis
- Feeling like you have lost your sense of self-identity and role in life (e.g. main breadwinner, parent, spouse)
- Feeling that you have no control over what happens in life
- Feeling lost

### ***How spiritual distress can be managed***

If one can find some resolutions to their questions, they can see their illness and suffering differently, and find a renewed sense of purpose. Spiritual support is an important component of cancer care that can help you work through these problems, allow you to cope better and have a better quality of life. This is a dynamic process that continues through diagnosis, treatment and survivorship or the end of life.

Your doctor or nurse may work with you to identify your goals and options, or they may refer you to a medical social worker or psychologist, who conducts a spiritual assessment by asking you more questions (e.g. your beliefs, your support system). Depending on your needs, they may carry out further counselling sessions, or offer you resources to help with enhancing spiritual wellbeing.



### ***What you can do***

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share your concerns and struggles with a trusted friend or loved one. Talking with someone helps release tension and allows your loved one to understand you better</li><li>• Consider sharing your concerns with your religious leaders and members if you are linked to a religious group. They can be a great source of support</li><li>• Talk to your healthcare team about issues that you think may affect your cancer care. Your healthcare team may not ask about spiritual or religious issues that you find are important</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not keep silent about your struggles. This can create an emotional / physical distance between you and your loved ones</li><li>• Do not be embarrassed or shy to bring up your struggles with spiritual concerns with your religious group or healthcare team</li></ul>

- Consider joining a support group. Some people find it very helpful to talk to others who are experiencing or have experienced the same illness
- Engage in activities that promote mindfulness relaxation (e.g. yoga, meditation) or creative arts (e.g. writing, drawing, music) – these can help improve spiritual wellbeing

### ***When to call your cancer care team***

Please inform your doctor or nurse and request for a referral to see a social worker / psychologist if you experience any of the above problems and find that it is affecting your day to day functioning.

If you are a patient with NCCS, you may also call **+65 6436 8417** or **+65 6436 8088** to book an appointment to speak to our NCCS medical social worker/ clinical psychologist.

*The above contents are made available as part of TEMASEK FOUNDATION-ACCESS (Accessible Cancer Care to Enable Support for Survivors) PROGRAMME, a holistic care programme to support cancer patients during their care and recovery journey.*

*The contents have been approved by the Cancer Education Information Service, National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), for people with cancer and their families and caregivers. However, this information serves only as a guide and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis, treatment or advice. For specific medical conditions, please seek expert medical advice from your healthcare team.*

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