



*“Why can’t I  
shake this feeling?”*

Dealing with **emotional issues**  
after cancer treatment

HELP FROM  
GEORGIANS  
ON YOUR SIDE

GEORGIA  
**core**  
CENTER *for* ONCOLOGY  
RESEARCH & EDUCATION

**After cancer treatment, many people discover they need help.**

Even though survivorship begins the moment you learn you have cancer, your need for support might continue as you begin a “new normal.”

Here’s what Georgians who have finished cancer treatment often say about their emotions:



***“I’m sad or depressed.”***

Maybe you don’t laugh as much as you used to, and feel sad or empty at times. Or you may be feeling something even more serious, like clinical depression, or having suicidal thoughts.



***“I’m having trouble adjusting to life.”***

You’ve been seeing doctors, getting treatment, having tests done. During all of it, your regular life might have felt like it was on hold. It can be very hard to make the transition back to the way things used to be.



***“I feel alone.”***

Even if you’ve got family and friends close by, you may feel that they don’t completely understand what you’ve been through – or what you’re going through now.



***“I’m anxious.”***

Anxiety is a feeling of being “unsettled” somehow. It might be about a specific thing or just a general feeling. In having cancer, something bad has happened to you; with anxiety, it’s like you’re waiting for something bad to happen again.



***“I’m afraid the cancer will come back.”***

Understandably, this is the most common fear that cancer survivors have.

▼ **If these feelings are familiar, here are a few things to keep in mind...**

# It helps to know



## **Feelings can't be controlled.**

Your feelings are what they are. But what you can control is what you do. You can learn how to deal with your emotions and take actions that improve your outlook and make life better.



## **Your emotions may be mixed.**

It's possible to have a hard time with feelings even while you're grateful for having survived cancer. And while you may be very happy that treatment is over, it's normal to miss the people you saw regularly during treatment.



## **There may be a physical reason for your feelings.**

Mind and body influence each other. Studies show that the body's fight against cancer can affect the brain and explain why you feel the way you do. Some of the treatments you received can also have an effect on your mood and outlook.



## **You're not alone.**

Georgia has more than 450,000 cancer survivors, and research shows that most have some anxiety. Many experience sadness or depression. The fear of cancer returning is a big factor in survivors' worry and distress.



## **Recovery from treatment takes time.**

Many survivors are surprised that life doesn't immediately go back to the way it used to be. Their families and friends don't always understand this, either.

**Now, the good news: You can get help dealing with all of these feelings.**

# What you can do right now

## Find out how serious your emotional issues are.

A helpful tool online is the “Distress Thermometer.” It’s a simple checklist that helps you get clear on exactly what’s troubling you the most. It only takes a minute or two to fill it out. You can then share this with any professional who can help.

[Try the Distress Thermometer now >](#)

## Talk to your doctor.

You’ll still have appointments with your doctor after finishing treatment. Plan to talk to him or her about anything that’s troubling you. Your doctor can refer you to a therapist or other counseling, and in some cases, prescribe medication.

(You can bring your Distress Thermometer checklist, or even this brochure, if it helps you to describe how you’re feeling.)

## Get a genetic test and advice.

If you’re especially worried about cancer returning, you might be able to determine your risk by getting a genetic test.

Genetic tests look at genes that have been passed on to you from your family. They’re typically a simple blood test analyzed in a lab.

While there’s not a genetic test that measures your risk for all cancers, there may be one or more that will help you figure out the likelihood of having a particular cancer.

- ▶ Call the help line of a nonprofit called FORCE at 866-266-7475 and key in extension 704. A knowledgeable volunteer will answer general questions and help you find a genetic counselor near you.



## Get 1-to-1 counseling.

You have many options for talking with a trained counselor near you. Your healthcare team can recommend someone who works with the hospital or is in your community. If you have a place of worship, someone there will likely have some suggestions, too. Or you can look online (see below).

It's perfectly OK – and even a good idea – to talk with more than one counselor by phone before you schedule visits. You can get an idea of how comfortable you are with that person. You might ask if he or she has worked with cancer survivors before.

Some ways to find a counselor:

- ▶ A hospital near you may offer counseling. To find out, visit the hospital's website and enter **cancer survivor** counseling in the Search box. Then get in touch with a counselor.

[Check out Imerman Angels](#), a 1-1 cancer support community

The website **Therapy for Black Girls** provides a list of therapists in your area (and they serve people of all races and backgrounds). [Visit the site now >](#)

## SURVIVORS SHARE THEIR STORIES



Rebecca Palpant-Shimkets champions services and support for survivors and caregivers after experiencing depression following her treatment.

She encourages post-treatment screenings for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

[See Rebecca's story >](#)

## Join a cancer support group.

All over Georgia, support groups of cancer survivors are getting together to share their experiences and concerns. You can also join an online group.

Support groups can be specific – for example, just for women or just for men, or focusing on a certain cancer type. Or they could be general. What makes them helpful is that you talk with other cancer survivors, and a professional guides the discussion.

[Check out online support groups at the website CancerCare >](#)

- ▶ Visit the website of a hospital near you and enter **cancer support group** in the Search box.
- ▶ Call the Cancer Support help line at 888-793-9355 and ask for help finding a support group in your area or an online support group. (It's offered free by The Cancer Support Community.)

# 5 good ways to learn more

When looking for more information on survivorship, it's easy to get overwhelmed. There's so much out there. To help guide you through whatever emotional challenges you face, we've found five good places to start.

## 1 Website: [GeorgiaCancerInfo.org](http://GeorgiaCancerInfo.org)



This website serves Georgians with cancer – and an entire area is dedicated to helping you learn how to deal with

emotional issues after treatment. Click on Survivorship, then Mental Health Resources. You'll see a list of resources, each around a specific topic or issue.

[Visit: GeorgiaCancerInfo.org/Survivorship >](http://GeorgiaCancerInfo.org/Survivorship)

## 2 Booklet: “Facing Forward: Life After Cancer Treatment”

The National Cancer Institute created this guide in 2019 – and it's a good one. An entire section is about “Your Feelings.” It provides more information on the topics in this brochure, plus related issues like returning to work, dealing with body issues and coping with family problems. You can download it as a .pdf or to your device.

[Get: Facing Forward Guide >](#)

*This brochure is published for cancer survivors by the Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education, Inc. (Georgia CORE)*  
**GeorgiaCancerInfo.org**

## 3 Help Line: 888-793-9355



If you just don't know where to turn, start with the Cancer Support Help Line. A trained volunteer will talk with you and

then provide ways to help. The toll-free line is run by a nonprofit called Cancer Support Community. Hours: Monday – Friday 9 a.m.– 9 p.m. Eastern Time; Saturday – Sunday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Eastern Time.

▶ Call: 888-793-9355 and follow the instructions to talk with a helpful associate.

## 4 Audio Program: “Living Beyond Cancer”

Sometimes it helps to listen to others' experiences and hear their advice. This online audio program covers several different issues of life after cancer treatment – and a 20-minute section of the program is about “Emotional Aspects of Cancer.” The program is part of the Cancer Survival Toolbox.

[Listen: Living Beyond Cancer >](#)

## 5 Website: Support Services

The nonprofit CancerCare provides all kinds of emotional support services for people who have been treated for cancer. The services are free, and you can find them on the “survivorship” area of CancerCare's website.

[See: Post-Treatment Survivorship >](#)