

Young Adults and Cancer

- Every 8 minutes, an American between the ages of 15-40 is diagnosed with cancer.
- Young adulthood is **a particularly challenging time** to be diagnosed since it corresponds with many important developmental milestones (partnerships/marriage, having children, becoming established in a career, dealing with aging parents' needs, etc.)
- It is **extremely normal** to experience **a range of emotions**: anger, frustration, depression/sadness, anxiety/worrying, guilt, fear, grief, loss, loneliness, and feelings of unfairness. You may also notice that your emotions change very quickly and with little warning. Changes in appetite, sleep, and sex drive are also common.
- You likely have established (or are in the process of establishing) your identity as an independent adult, and it can be hard to have your parents step into a more active parenting role when you become sick (even if you acknowledge it is necessary or helpful).

Here are some suggestions for coping with these experiences and feelings:

- **Talk with someone you trust** as a way to get support and sort out what you are thinking and feeling.
- **Talk with other young adults with cancer.** It can be very helpful to talk with others who are going through similar experiences. Your doctor may be able to help you meet others also interested in connecting.
- **Connect online.** The Internet can be a great way to connect with others who have cancer. Some people find it easier to communicate online, especially about difficult topics. Websites such as <http://stupidcancer.org> are designed especially for young adults.
- **Consider talking with a psychologist or social worker.** They can offer support and assist you in finding ways to cope. They can also help provide support to you and your romantic partner as a couple, to your romantic partner, to your parents, and to your children.
- **Write it down.** Writing in a journal about your thoughts and feelings can be a way to relieve stress and process your thoughts and feelings.
- **Explore non-verbal ways to express yourself**, such as drawing, making a collage, or physical movement activities such as yoga.
- **Talk with your family and friends about what you need from them.** Are they becoming too involved or not giving you enough support?
- Consider **establishing an online blog** through a site like www.Caringbridge.org. Blogs can provide a space for you to express yourself and you can ask friends and family to look here for updates, so that you do not have to provide updates to everyone individually (which can be burdensome).
- **Take time to do things you enjoy.** It can feel like cancer steals your identity, turning you into "The Cancer Patient." Take time to focus on who you are and what you enjoy that has nothing to do with cancer.
- Having cancer often makes people feel out of control. It can be helpful to **focus on specific tasks you do have control over** and work to accomplish them.

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Young Adult Support Groups in the Denver Metro Area

Young Survivors Group at Porter Adventist Hospital: This is a monthly group, meeting the first Thursday of each month from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. in Cottonwood Springs Conference Room. It is open to anyone in their 20s and 30s with any type of cancer. It is also open to the support people in their lives. This group is a combination of support, discussion, guest speakers and social gatherings. No fee or registration is required. Call Melissa Gilstrap at (303) 269-4348 for more information.

Young Adults Conquering Cancer (YACC) Support Group at University of Colorado Cancer Center: This group occurs approximately every 3 months and covers issues that are important to young adults. The group is open to cancer survivors, ages 18 to 40, of any diagnosis and who are in any stage of treatment or follow-up. For more information, please call (720) 848-0316.