

What are the facts about head and neck cancer and depression?

As many as 50 out of 100 people with head and neck cancer will develop Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) during or after cancer treatment. **Major Depressive Disorder** is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. To be diagnosed with depression, the symptoms must be present for at least two weeks. Individuals with head and neck cancer who develop MDD have poorer quality-of-life and are significantly more likely to die from their disease

What are the symptoms of MDD?

Symptoms of MDD may include:

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Disturbances in sleep, eating, and concentration
- Suicidal thoughts or actions

These symptoms are sometimes difficult for you and your doctor to distinguish from the effects of your cancer treatment

How can MDD be prevented?

- Your doctor has prescribed you a low-dose antidepressant medication, called a Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI), as a crucial part of your treatment regimen

- Studies show that starting an SSRI as soon as possible after your cancer diagnosis will:
 - Significantly reduce your risk of developing MDD
 - May significantly improve your mental health and well-being
- Discuss side effects of the medication with your doctor. These are usually mild but may include sexual dysfunction, stomach upset, or diarrhea

Where can I find more resources?

- U of M Oncology Social Work
 - Initial contact for Cancer Center mental health and PsychOncology program services
 - Phone: (734) 647-8901
- U of M PsychOncology Program
 - Website: <https://www.mcancer.org/support/managing-emotions/psychoncology>
 - Phone: (877) 907-0859
- American Cancer Society Patient Resources
 - Website: <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects.html>

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