

Learning to relax when you have cancer

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People with cancer can have many fears and be very confused. It can be hard to cope with cancer treatment and its side effects. People also worry about money, family and jobs.

It is normal for people to feel tense, fearful and even angry when they have cancer. Tension can cause headaches, stomach-aches, sore back and shoulders, indigestion and difficulty sleeping. Over a long time, anxiety and tension can make people exhausted and physically ill. It is possible to learn how to cope with tension. In this information sheet, we suggest some ways to cope.

Learn about your illness

It can help to learn about cancer and its treatment. Find out about side effects and what can be done about them. Many people find that the more they know about their cancer, the more 'in control' they feel. They are more confident making decisions about treatment, finances, and many other things.

Remember, what has happened to others will not necessarily happen to you. Only your doctor can tell you what you can expect.

Talk about it

When you are first told you have cancer you may not want to talk about it. It is much easier to cope with a problem when you talk about it with someone else. Talking often helps people to find new ways of dealing with problems. It helps to share feelings and fears.

People need to talk to someone they trust. It might be someone close, like a family member or friend. It may be a doctor or nurse, or another health professional, support worker or religious adviser. Some people prefer professional counselling from a psychologist or social worker.

Call our cancer information line if you need help finding a counsellor.

Join a cancer support group

In a cancer support group, people meet others who have been in a similar situation to theirs, and talk and share about how they cope. Many groups also teach relaxation, meditation and problem-solving. There may be a cancer support group of people who speak your language.

You could join a Living With Cancer Education Program. These give information on cancer and ways of coping. They run over several weeks. Ask the social worker at the hospital for information. There may be a program in your language.

Exercise and sleep

Exercise can help a person to feel better and more relaxed. For some people, jogging is good. Others prefer walking, swimming or some other activity. People with cancer should check with their doctor before starting new exercise.

Relaxation techniques can help people to sleep. Doctors can tell people where to find help if they are not sleeping well.

► *English*

Cancer information line:

- English
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Do things you enjoy

Concentrate on the things that really matter, and try to ignore things that are not important. Accept offers of help.

Try to get out of the house often, even if only for short outings. See a funny film – laughing is a wonderful way of feeling good, even if it is the last thing you thought you could do. Or escape into some music for a while – anything you find relaxing or satisfying. Some people enjoy keeping a journal.

Seek religious or spiritual support

Religion is important for many people. It can help to talk to someone from a religion that you respect. They can talk about ideas, doubts and beliefs and help a person be more peaceful.

Learn how to relax

Learning to relax the body and mind can help a person feel good and in control.

Try this simple relaxation.

Find a warm, quiet place. Sit in a comfortable chair and relax. Or lie on your back, with your

arms by your side. Close your eyes. Breathe in gradually and deeply. Hold the air for a few seconds. Then breathe out gradually, and let your body become relaxed and heavy. Keep breathing like this for some minutes. Each time you breathe out, feel tension leave your body. You may begin to feel calmer and more peaceful.

Other things people have tried

- Massage can be relaxing. It often takes away tension and makes a person feel comfortable. Check with your doctor that massage is all right for you.
- You could learn to meditate. This may help you to 'slow' your thinking so that your thoughts do not race around and make you anxious.
- T'ai chi is slow, gentle, rhythmical and continuous movements, like slow dancing.
- Yoga combines exercises for the body with 'exercises' for the mind. Yoga is a skill that takes time to learn. You might like to join a local yoga class.

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