



Coping with a Cancer Diagnosis

Being diagnosed with cancer is a life change event. It brings about a range of emotions and feelings including worry, anger, sadness, strength, hope, fear, nervousness, doubt, and guilt. These emotions and feelings are normal and to be expected at various points in your cancer experience.

Coping is defined as the ability to "successfully deal with a difficult situation." You will have good days and bad days, but successful coping with your diagnosis and treatment plan can help you adjust to life with and after cancer.

Just as everyone's cancer diagnosis and treatment plan are unique, so are their reactions and ways of coping with their cancer diagnosis. It's important to give yourself (and your family) permission to feel and experience these emotions, to talk about them, work through them, and get help if and when you need it. Remember that it is OK to feel distressed, depressed, anxious, sad, worried, nervous, happy, relief, hopeful, and any other emotion.

Coping tips and tricks:

- **Get informed:** learn about your diagnosis, treatment, potential side effects, and interventions available to help you through treatment. Knowledge is power; don't be afraid to ask questions and do your research. At the same time, know your limits for information. It is OK to tell a friend or family member that you don't need anymore information.
- **Stay active:** light exercise is very helpful in relieving stress. You don't have to run a 5k or go to a 60-minute spin class. Even a short walk around the neighborhood can be energizing. Listen to our webinar on [exercise during cancer treatment](#) for helpful tips.
- **Avoid social isolation:** While you may not feel like entertaining company every day, you can still remain connected with social supports even if it's through a phone call, Facebook, a blog post, or an email. Talk with friends and family who care about you and are available to listen, hold your hand, cry with you, and laugh with you. It's also OK to embrace alone time but find balance.
- **Consider integrative methods:** this could include yoga, art therapy, music therapy, spiritual support, reiki, meditation, and relaxation techniques.
- **Get connected with others:** There is strength in numbers. Connect with another patient or family member through a peer support matching program. Talking with another person who has "walked in your shoes," can be reassuring and counter the sense that you are going through this alone. Or, participate in a support group through your treatment center, local cancer support services agency, or online.
- **Communicate with your medical team:** Let us know if you are having a hard time coping with your diagnosis and treatment.
- **Eat well, get plenty of rest, and continue to exercise:** Your healthcare team can refer you to a dietitian or cancer rehabilitation program to help you maintain your health during treatment. What helped you cope with difficult experiences in your life before cancer? Identifying the techniques that you used to help manage other periods of stress and distress in your life – put those time-trusted techniques to use now.
- **Talk with a therapist:** Therapists can help you cope with the range of emotions you may be

experiencing as part of having cancer. [Finding a therapist](#) can take some work but having that safe, supportive person is worth it. Your insurance shouldn't be a barrier to getting mental health support. [The Healthwell Foundation](#) offers a cancer related behavioral health copay fund that provides financial assistance for copays, medications and transportation to therapy appointments. A social worker or navigator can help you investigate your mental health benefits and identify practitioners who are within your insurance company's provider network. Remember that employer-based resources (employee assistance programs) may be available as well.

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