

Coping With Uncertainty [1]

Many people with cancer face uncertainty. If you or someone you love has cancer or has had cancer, you may feel that your life is less secure or predictable than it once was or that you don't know what the future holds. It is important to ask for support when you are feeling this way; there are many professionals available who can help.

Causes of uncertainty

Whether you've been newly diagnosed with cancer or are a long-term survivor, there are common worries a person with cancer or a family member or friend may experience:

Having to put plans on hold. You may feel like you are unable to look to the future. Making plans is difficult for many practical reasons. For instance, it may be hard to plan a family vacation when you may not know when your doctors' appointments will be or when you will need treatment. You may not be able to commit to a lunch date because you cannot predict how you will be feeling. Some individuals feel unable to make plans. One approach that works well for many people with cancer is to remain flexible and accept that plans may change.

Fear about cancer treatments and their side effects. You may be apprehensive or even scared of the side effects of treatment, such as pain, nausea, or fatigue. Or, you may fear becoming dependent on others during cancer treatment or missing out on activities that you enjoy. Learn more about [coping with the fear of treatment side effects](#) [2].

Long-term cancer survivors may worry about developing [late effects](#) [3], which are defined as side effects of cancer treatment that occur months or years after treatment ends. If you are worried about this, talk with members of your health care team about what you can expect and resources that are available if you need help.

The treatment won't work. No treatment works the same for every patient - even those with the same form of cancer. Some treatments are more effective for some people. Other treatments may work but cause problematic side effects. [Understanding what your treatment options are](#) [4] today and in the future may help you know what to expect next.

The treatment will stop working. Many times, people continue to receive a cancer drug until it stops working, especially those with metastatic cancer (cancer that has spread) or those with cancer that may be controlled with medication for a long time. For example, people with [chronic myelogenous leukemia \(CML\)](#)

[5] may take the drug imatinib (Gleevec) for as many as 10 years after the diagnosis. It is scary to think the drug could stop being effective, even if you know there are other therapies available.

The cancer will come back. Cancer recurrence (the return of the cancer) is a top fear of many cancer survivors. If you are worried about this you may find yourself paying attention to every new symptom in the body, and this too can increase your general level of anxiety. Learn more about [coping with the fear of recurrence](#) [6].

Fear of dying or losing someone you love. Confronting the idea of dying can be difficult. Feeling vulnerable is understandable when you are faced with the prospect of dying or losing someone you love. It's normal to struggle with a fear of death but if these feelings become overwhelming, talk with a member of your health care team about resources to help you cope.

Dealing with the ?what ifs? of cancer

Sometimes uncertainty leads to other feelings, such as anxiety, anger, sadness, or fear. Uncertainty may even manifest itself as physical sensations that interrupt sleep or interfere with your ability to concentrate or enjoy activities. Learning to manage the uncertainty is an important part of staying emotionally healthy. Follow these tips to help you cope:

- Talk with your doctor or another member of your health care team if your feelings of uncertainty are interfering with daily activities. They can help you find the resources you need to feel better.
- Talk with a [counselor](#) [7] or social worker at the hospital. They may recommend a [support group](#) [8] in your area where you can share with others who have been through a similar cancer experience. There are also [support communities online](#) [9].
- Talk with friends and family members. Tell them how you are feeling and how they can help.
- Learn as much as you can about cancer and its treatment. Having the right information can help you know what to expect.

More Information

[The Benefits of Counseling](#) [10]

[Finding Comfort through Journaling](#) [11]

[Managing Side Effects](#) [12]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/managing-emotions/coping-uncertainty>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24492>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25396>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24582>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19106>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25241>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24558>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>

- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24528>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25238>