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## [Managing Stress](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 09/2015



Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Managing Stress](#) [3], adapted from this content.

A disease such as cancer is often one of the most stressful experiences of a person's life. Coping with cancer can be more challenging with added stress from work, family, or financial concerns. Usual, everyday stress can also make coping with a cancer diagnosis more difficult.

Stress has not been shown to cause cancer. But chronic stress may weaken the immune system, causing other health problems and decreasing feelings of well-being.

### Tips for reducing stress

Stressors are sources of stress. Some stressors are predictable and, therefore, sometimes avoidable. You can often lower the number of stressors in your life by making small changes. Consider the following tips for reducing stress:

- **Avoid scheduling conflicts.** Use a day planner or electronic calendar to keep track of your appointments and activities. When you schedule activities, allow plenty of time to finish one activity before starting the next. Don't schedule too many activities for the same day or week, especially activities that require preparation.

- **Be aware of your limits.** If you don't have the time or energy, it's ok to say a polite "no" when people ask you to take on tasks. At work, don't volunteer for projects that would make your workload unmanageable. If saying "no" feels difficult, tell the person asking what you can do instead. This could be doing smaller part of the task or having more time to complete the task.
- **Ask for help.** Ask family, friends, and coworkers for help. People are likely to offer their support, so think about specific tasks you need help with beforehand. For example, family or friends may be able to help with shopping or picking up a child from school.
- **Prioritize your tasks.** Make a list of the things you have to do, such as work and chores. Rank these things by importance, considering the things you must do and the things that are important to you. If you don't have time to do everything, concentrate on the tasks and activities at the top of your list.
- **Break down tasks into smaller steps.** Break large tasks or problems into smaller steps, and approach the steps one at a time. This process can make seemingly overwhelming problems easier to handle. For example, instead of spending an afternoon cleaning your house, tackle one or two rooms each day.
- **Concentrate your efforts on things you can control.** For instance, the doctor's schedule and traffic are out of your control, even with the best planning. People who can remain flexible keep their stress low. Sometimes the only aspect of a problem you can control is how you react to it.
- **Get help with financial problems.** Talk with an oncology social worker or a financial advisor familiar with cancer about cancer-related insurance and financial matters. Do not wait to seek financial help. Late bills and debt can quickly become overwhelming. Learn more about [managing the cost of cancer care](#) [4].

## Stress management strategies

Although you can try to reduce the number of stressors in your life, you can't completely avoid stress. However, stress management strategies can help you feel more relaxed and less anxious. The following are tips to help reduce stress:

- **Exercise regularly.** Moderate exercise such as a 30-minute walk several times a week can help lower stress. Talk with your doctor before starting an exercise schedule. Learn [suggestions and tips for physical activity](#) [5].

- **Schedule social activities.** Make time to socialize with family or friends, as it is a good way to reduce stress.
- **Eat well, and get plenty of sleep.** Maintaining a healthy diet and getting enough rest will give you more energy to deal with daily stressors. Learn more about [nutrition during treatment](#) [6].
- **Join a support group.** Support groups offer you the chance to talk about your feelings and fears with others who share and understand your experiences. You can also talk with a trusted friend, a counselor, or a social worker. Learn more about [support groups](#) [7].
- **Schedule daily relaxing time.** Spend time doing an activity you find relaxing, such as reading a book, gardening, or listening to music.
- **Do things you enjoy.** Eat at your favorite restaurant, or watch your favorite television show. Laughter reduces stress; see a funny movie or read a humorous book.
- **Write in a journal.** Writing about the stresses and events in your life provides a private way to express your feelings.
- **Learn a new hobby.** Engaging in a new and challenging activity gives you a sense of accomplishment and provides distraction from daily worries. Examples include taking an art class or playing a musical instrument.

## Relaxation techniques

Many people learn and practice relaxation techniques to lower stress. You can learn most of them in a few sessions with a counselor. And, many hospitals and cancer centers have classes to teach patients relaxation techniques. You can do these techniques daily or at specific stressful times, such as during a medical procedure.

- **Relaxed or deep breathing.** This technique involves deep, slow breathing while concentrating on filling the lungs and relaxing muscles.
- **Mental imagery or visualization.** This helps you create peaceful and relaxing images in the mind.

- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** This technique involves tightening and then relaxing muscles. Most people start at either the toes or the head and progressively relax all the muscles across the body.
- **Meditation.** With this technique, you can learn to relax your mind and concentrate on an inner sense of calm.
- **Biofeedback.** This technique can teach you to relax and control your body's response to stress by paying attention to signals from the body.
- **Yoga.** Yoga focuses the mind on breathing and posture to promote relaxation and reduce fatigue.

## More Information

[Coping With Cancer](#) [8]

## Additional Resource

[National Cancer Institute: Psychological Stress and Cancer](#) [9]

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### Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/managing-stress>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22971>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24865>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24996>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24985>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/21>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/stress>