

Managing Stress [1]



Listen to the Cancer.Net Podcast: [Managing Stress](#)[2], adapted from this content.

A disease such as cancer can be one of the most stressful experiences of a person's life. The stress of cancer and its treatment is increased by family, work, and financial concerns, in addition to everyday stress that was present before the cancer diagnosis.

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

Tips for reducing stress

Some sources of stress (known as stressors) are predictable and can often be avoided. Making small changes can help lower the number of stressors in your life. 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 scheduling 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. Allow yourself to say "no" when people ask you to take on tasks that you don't have time or energy to complete because of [fatigue](#) [3] from the cancer and its treatment. At work, don't volunteer for projects that would make your workload unmanageable.

Ask for help. Ask family, friends, and coworkers for help. People are likely to offer their support, so think about specific tasks you need assistance with in advance, such as 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, and rank them in order of importance, considering both things you must do and 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. Ask an oncology social worker or a financial adviser who is familiar with cancer for advice on dealing with cancer-related insurance and financial matters. Do not wait to seek financial help; late bills and debt can quickly become overwhelming if they are not handled properly. Learn more about [managing the cost of cancer care](#) [4].

Stress management strategies

While you can try to reduce the number of stressors in your life, it is not possible to eliminate all stress. However, stress management strategies help you feel more relaxed and less anxious. The following list includes suggestions to help reduce stress:

Get frequent, moderate exercise. Moderate exercise—such as a 30-minute walk, swim, or bike ride—lowers stress when done at least several times a week. Talk with your doctor before starting an exercise regimen (schedule). Learn more about [physical activity and cancer](#) [5].

Schedule social activities. Plan times to socialize with family and friends. Spending time with supportive friends and family is one of the most significant ways 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 [diet and nutrition](#) [6] and [strategies for a better night's sleep](#) [7].

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](#) [8].

Schedule daily leisure 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. Learn more about [coping with cancer through humor](#) [9].

Write in a journal. Writing about the stresses and events in your life provides a private way to express your feelings. Learn more about [finding comfort through journaling](#) [10].

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 enrolling in an art class or playing a musical instrument.

Relaxation techniques

The following techniques may help you relax when feeling stressed. These techniques must be learned and practiced to become effective. Most can be learned in a few sessions with a counselor. Many hospitals and cancer centers have classes to teach patients relaxation techniques. Some of these techniques can be learned by following written directions. These techniques can be done daily, as well as at specific stressful times, such as during a medical procedure.

Relaxed or deep breathing. A technique that involves deep, slow breathing while concentrating on filling the lungs and relaxing muscles

Mental imagery or visualization. A technique for creating peaceful and relaxing images in the mind

Progressive muscle relaxation. A technique that involves tightening and then relaxing muscles, starting at either the toes or the head and progressively relaxing all the muscles across the body

Meditation. A technique in which you learn to relax your mind and concentrate on an inner sense of calm

Biofeedback. A technique in which you are taught to relax and control your body's response to stress by paying attention to signals from the body

Yoga. A technique that focuses the mind on breathing and posture to promote relaxation and to reduce fatigue

More Information

[Coping \[11\]](#)

Additional Resources

[National Cancer Institute: Psychological Stress and Cancer \[12\]](#)

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Links:

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

[2] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/Managing_Stress.mp3

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25048>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24865>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24967>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24965>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24686>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Publications+and+Resources/Support+and+Resource+Links/General+Cancer+Organizations+and>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24807>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24528>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/21>

[12] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/stress>