

# Managing Symptoms after Prostate Cancer

## Coping with Cancer Stress

*Skills for Patients and Families*

### ***After cancer, patients and families often ask: How can I cope with this stress?***

Cancer can be a stressful journey. Feelings of sadness, fear, and anger are normal. Your feelings might change from moment to moment and day to day. Practicing ways to cope with stress will keep your feelings more level and help you feel hopeful. It can improve your outlook on life and your relationships with others. Here are ways to cope that may be helpful for you and your family.

### ***Take care of the basics – healthy eating, exercise, and rest.***

It is easy to forget about your basic health needs when dealing with stress. Here are some tips and reminders:

#### **Eating:**

Healthy eating can keep up your strength. Your strength will help you cope and manage stress better. Try this:

- Eat fruits and vegetables every day. Aim for 5 servings.
- Choose healthy snacks with protein, such as nuts, yogurt, and cheese.
- Drink enough water. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much to drink.
- Talk with your care team about changes to your appetite or tastes that make eating healthy a challenge.



#### **Exercise:**

Exercise can boost your energy, brighten your mood, and lower stress. Try this:

- Walk 10 to 15 minutes each day. Do more if you can.
- If it's hard to leave the house for exercise, use an exercise DVD or find videos on the internet. Dance or chair exercise, yoga, and stretching are options.
- Talk to your doctor about other activities you might enjoy.

#### **Rest:**

Don't put off sleep to try to "catch up" later. Make time for rest and sleep daily. Try this:

- Create a bedtime routine that helps you fall asleep and stay asleep. This includes going to bed at the same time each night and getting up at the same time each morning, even on weekends. Relax before bedtime by reading, bathing, or listening to quiet music—whatever works to soothe you.

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- If you drink coffee, tea or soda with caffeine, drink them just in the morning.
- If you drink alcohol, don't drink it in the 3 hours before bedtime. It may put you to sleep, but it can wake you up after just a few hours.
- If you nap during the day, set a limit of 15-60 minutes. Then do something active. Some people also find they sleep better at night if they avoid daytime naps. Find what works for you. This may change over time.



## ***Try different ways to relieve anxious feelings.***

- Talk with others who are close, such as family and friends. Often, just sharing heavy feelings can lighten your load. Don't worry about being "a burden." Your family and friends may be waiting for you to tell them how you feel.
  - Write your feelings down. Keep a notebook of your feelings and thoughts. Don't worry about spelling and writing mistakes! This is just for you. Writing things down can help you understand yourself better. It can help you feel a greater sense of control.
  - Join a support group. A cancer support group offers the chance for patients or family members to talk with others who have been in a similar situation. It can help you feel less alone. Group members can listen to your concerns, and you can listen to theirs. You may be able to join a group at your treatment center, online, or in your community.
- [Visit Cancercare® Website to learn more about online groups](#)
  - Talk with a counselor. When coping with a difficult illness, it's often helpful to talk with a trained professional counselor. This might be a social worker, nurse, psychologist, psychiatrist, or clergy. If you're not sure who could help, ask your care team.
  - Try inspiring books, poems, or music.
  - Remember to take each day as it comes, one day at a time. Focus on what you need to do today. Break projects up into small parts. This will help you to not feel overwhelmed.

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## ***Try different ways to relax.***

- Experiment with ways to create a calm feeling inside you. Some use meditation. Others use prayer, music, art, or nature to create a sense of calmness. Books and CDs can help you learn different calming techniques.
- Practice muscle and breathing techniques. If you have never tried this, here are some basic directions. You can get the hang of it with a little practice:
  - Close your eyes. Breathe deeply.
  - Focus on tensing and then relaxing each body part.
  - Start with your toes and work your way up to your head.
  - Once relaxed, think of a pleasant place or experience.You might also want to try using a relaxation CD to help you.

## ***Do activities that you enjoy. Do what brings you pleasure.***

Taking time each day to do things you enjoy can help you from feeling that cancer has “taken over your life.” Pace yourself so that you can be active without overdoing it. Try new activities that challenge you, give you pleasure, and help you set goals.

- Make time for hobbies you love. You can modify them to fit your energy. For example, if you love to garden, perhaps you can grow plants outdoors. If you love golf or tennis, enjoy games on TV or coach others.



- Try reading books or watching movies that make you laugh. Humor can lighten up your life and help you forget worries.
- Spend time with people you enjoy. Friends and family can bring feelings of support, joy, and even peace into your life.
- Enjoy nature. Spending time in nature can help you relax your mind and restore your energy. Depending on the weather, you might sit outside and look at the trees or flowers. You can visit a park and watch birds. You can take a walk. If you’re stuck inside, you can gaze out a window or perhaps put a bird feeder close by.

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## ***Finding meaning and purpose in your life.***

Some people find that cancer causes them to reflect on what is most important in their lives. For some, the search for the meaning is an important part of their cancer experience. Some realize more than before how much they value and love their family. Some people reflect on their life journey. Others find meaning by focusing on the simple things in life. Some people seek and find support from a religious or spiritual community.

Each person is different. Each person can decide whether to try to find meaning when dealing with cancer and what this meaning might be. You might discover ways that you have grown or benefited from your cancer experience. You can take this chance to reflect on what you value most and spend time and energy on those things.

## ***When should I get help?***

You can ask your healthcare team for a referral to a mental health counselor if you want help to cope with stress. Be sure to ask for help if:

- You have big mood swings that include periods of depression and periods of feeling “high” or full of energy.
- Your feelings are getting in the way of taking care of yourself.
- You cannot sleep at night or get out of bed in the morning.
- You are thinking about hurting or killing yourself.
- You feel “down” all the time or are depressed. You feel unable to cope with stress.

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This guide contains general information and is not meant to replace consultation with your doctor or nurse.

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