

Staying Hopeful When the Future is Uncertain

You can learn how to stay hopeful with cancer.

The future is always uncertain, and having cancer is likely to make you feel more uncertain than ever before. Your health care team cannot be 100% sure of your future, even though we now have better cancer treatments than in the past.

Some people with cancer become so stressed and anxious that they forget to live and enjoy each day. You can choose a different path. You can learn to cope and hope, using tips and tools that have worked for millions of cancer survivors. Having a positive outlook will support your treatment and give you courage.



Tips and Tools to Maintain a Positive Outlook

Learn all you can about your disease and your treatment.

- This will help you feel more in control and lessen anxious feelings. Ask questions at medical visits. If you keep a pad and pencil handy at home, you can write your questions down as they occur and then ask them at your next visit. You can also ask your nurse or doctor for written information and for websites they recommend.
- If your treatment center offers classes or programs about cancer and cancer treatment, sign up!

Stay close to family and friends who are hopeful and supportive.

- Other people's hopefulness can rub off on you. Limit or avoid time with people who are negative or critical.
- Strong connections with trusted, hopeful others will help you feel less alone. You may want to talk with them about treatment choices. You may need to remind family and friends that you want to stay in control of choices, rather than have them make decisions for you.

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Learn to manage feelings that go up and down like a roller coaster.

- Strong feelings such as anger, fear, and sadness are normal. Feeling hopeless or 'down in the dumps' at times is also normal. You might feel as if your emotions are on a roller coaster. Hope and hopelessness may both be present when a family is facing cancer.

- Tips to manage feelings:

- *Talk about your feelings.* It's true — just sharing feelings with a trusted person can bring a big sense of relief. Consider joining a cancer support group, a safe place to share. Or, try writing in a journal or taping your feelings and experiences. The goal is to give feelings some "air" and not keep them all inside where they can overwhelm you.

- *Focus on today.* Try to let go of worrying about things you cannot control. If you worry about tomorrow, you might miss a chance to enjoy today. Don't let fear run your life.

- *Look for silver linings.* You can have control over how you view the world. Some see a half glass of water as half empty. Others see it as half full. Seeing it as half full leads to coping and hoping. Don't let yourself get caught in self-pity. You are not alone. There are over 11 million cancer survivors in the United States.

- *Remember your strengths.* Most likely, you have coped with tough situations in the past. Think about how



you did it. This will build faith and confidence that you can handle challenges you now face.

- *Use reminders.* Sometimes simple notes, posters, and pictures help remind us to stay hopeful. Choose things that have meaning to you and put them where you can see them every day.

- *If cure is not possible, find out if treatment can help you feel better or lengthen your survival.* Some cancer patients hope for more time in remission, even if cure is not possible, and are willing to make some changes and sacrifices.

- *If you are depressed or can't cope and hope, get help.* Ask your care team for a referral to a mental health counselor. It's OK to ask for help. There is no shame. In fact, this is a wise choice if you are not coping well.

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Practice habits that increase your sense of control and well-being.

- Use a spiritual practice that has meaning for you. Some attend church, pray, or visit with clergy. Others read inspiring books or poems, listen to music, or find comfort in nature.
- Do hobbies or activities you enjoy. This will prevent you from feeling that cancer has “taken over your life.” You may need to adjust to having less energy. For example, you could tend a plant instead of a whole garden, or hike a path instead of a mountain. Pace yourself.
- Find a way to relax to manage stress. You can try deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or other methods. There are many books, tapes, and classes that can teach you how to relax. Find one that works for you.
- Do not manage stress with drugs or alcohol, overeating, or avoiding activities or people. In the long run, they will increase stress.

- Enjoy physical comforts. These might include having loved ones sit close or give hugs. They might also include massage or warm baths. Find what soothes you.

- Find things that make you laugh. Humor can help and heal. Try funny books and movies or try playing with children or pets.

- Practice common sense health habits. Eat healthy foods. Drink 8-10 glasses of water. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much you can drink. Be as active as you can. Get enough rest and sleep. Stay involved in life with family, work, volunteer activities, pets, or a hobby.

You didn't choose cancer, but you can choose how to cope and hope.

Learn and practice the tips and tools that offer you hope and comfort. Remember to focus on small joys, like the warmth of the sun, the taste of a favorite food, the caring of family or friends. Try to live in the present and value every day.

When should I see or call my doctor or nurse?

- If you want a referral to a mental health counselor to cope with your feelings.
- When you feel ‘down’ all the time (depressed).
- If you cannot sleep at night or get out of bed in the morning.
- If you have thoughts or plans to hurt yourself.



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

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