

Staying Hopeful When the Future is Uncertain

You can be hopeful.

The future is full of uncertainty. Having cancer may make you feel more uncertain than ever before. Your healthcare team cannot be 100% sure about your future, even though we now have better cancer treatments than in the past.

Some people with cancer have so much stress and anxiety that it can be hard to live and enjoy each day. You can choose a different path. You can choose to stay hopeful about your life and future. This doesn't mean each day will be perfect. It means looking at the future with a positive outlook.



Tips for a Positive Outlook

Having a positive outlook will support your treatment. It can help you feel better about your life now, even if you have uncertainty about the future. Try these tips and tools:

Learn about cancer and its treatment.

- Learning more can help decrease uncertainty and lower anxious feelings. It can also help you feel more in control.
- Ask questions at medical visits. If you keep a pad and pencil handy at home, you can write down your questions as they come to mind and ask them at your next visit.
- Ask your healthcare team for written information about your cancer and treatment. You can also ask them for books or websites they recommend.
- Sign up for classes and programs at your treatment center.

Stay close to people who support you.

- Strong relationships with trusted, hopeful people can help you feel more hopeful. Limit or avoid time with people who are negative or critical.
- You may want to talk with friends and family about treatment choices. Talking with them can help you be clearer about what you want. You may need to remind them that you want to stay in control of your choices, rather than have them make decisions for you.
- Plan activities you enjoy. Invite friends and family to join you.

Staying Hopeful When the Future is Uncertain

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

Strong feelings such as worry, 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 facing cancer.

Talk about your feelings.

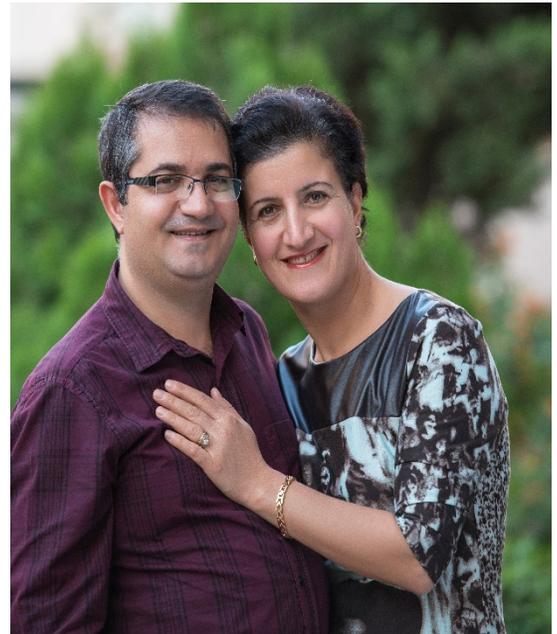
- It’s true – just sharing feelings with a trusted person can bring a big sense of relief.
- Consider joining a cancer support group, a safe place to share.
- Try writing in a journal or recording your feelings and experiences.
- Talk about your feelings out loud or on paper. Don’t keep them all inside 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.

- The way you choose to view your life and the world around you is powerful. Don’t let your troubles overwhelm you. Focus on the positive things that exist, despite challenges. See the good in yourself, in others, and your life.



Remember your strengths.

- Cancer may be the toughest thing you have ever dealt with. Most likely, you have coped with tough situations in the past. Think about how you did it. This will build your hope and confidence that you can handle challenges you face now. You have strengths to handle this situation.

Use reminders.

- Simple notes, posters, and pictures help remind people to stay hopeful. Choose things that have meaning to you and put them where you can see them every day: on a mirror, on the fridge, in your wallet, or even a bulletin board.

Whether or a not cure is possible, you have choices.

- Some people hope for more time in remission, even if a cure is not possible. Find out if treatment can lengthen your survival. Whether or not a cure is possible, ask about treatments that can help you feel better.

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

Take action. Make time for habits that help you find comfort and hope in your daily life. Practice things that worked before or try new habits.

Use a spiritual practice that has meaning for you.

- Some people attend church, pray, or visit with clergy. Others read inspiring books or poems, listen to music, or find comfort in nature.
- Spiritual practices can give you emotional comfort and hope. Practice gratitude. It can help you find meaning and purpose in life.

Do hobbies or activities you enjoy.

- Hobbies and activities can help you from feeling that cancer has “taken over your life.” Try new activities that challenge you, give you pleasure, and help you set goals.
- You may need to adjust to having less energy. For example, you could tend to a plant instead of a whole garden, or hike a path instead of a mountain. Pace yourself.

Find ways to relax.

- Stress can cause you to lose hope. Use relaxation to help you manage stress. You can try deep breathing, meditation, or other methods. There are many books, CDs, and classes that teach you how to relax. Find ways that work for you.

Enjoy physical comforts.

- This might include having loved ones sit close or give hugs. Some people enjoy massages or warm baths. Find what soothes you.

What makes you laugh?

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

Practice healthy habits.

- Eat healthy foods. Ask your healthcare team or see a dietician if you want tips for healthy eating. This may be very helpful if your appetite or tastes have changed.
- Get enough water. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much you should drink.
- Be as active as you can. Think about activities you can do when your energy is up and when it is down. Even a little activity can help your mood and wellbeing.
- Get enough rest and sleep.

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

- Talk to your healthcare team if you can't cope or feel overwhelmed. It's OK to ask for help.
- Stay involved in life with family, work, volunteer activities, pets, or a hobby.
- Learn and practice tips and tools that offer you hope and comfort.

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When should I see or call my doctor or nurse?

- You want help to cope with your feelings.
- You would like a referral to a mental health counselor.
- 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 feel “down” all the time or depressed.
- You feel unable to cope.
- You cannot sleep at night or get out of bed in the morning.
- You are thinking about hurting or killing yourself.



- You have been or are now getting treated for depression or other mental health conditions, and the symptoms have come back or gotten worse.
- Remember that your healthcare team is there to help. Talk with your doctor or nurse for ways to deal with your concerns.

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

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