

Help With Feeling Stressed, Worrying

Internet version of this handout with active resource links can be accessed at: <http://cancer-help.me/stress-Peoria>

A disease such as cancer can be one of the most stressful experiences of a person's life. Nearly half of cancer patients report experiencing significant distress. Anxiety and distress may affect a patient's ability to cope with a cancer diagnosis or treatment. Stress has not been shown to **cause** cancer, but experiencing stress over a long period of time can weaken the immune system, leading to other physical health problems. Untreated anxiety and long-term stress can also make other aspects of your care and health, like managing pain and getting a good night's sleep, more difficult. Even mild anxiety, arising from stress from work, family, or financial concerns, can make coping with cancer more difficult.

There are a variety of ways to cope with anxiety including relaxation techniques, psychological treatment (or counseling) and medication. Many are used together. Talk with your doctor or a mental health professional to find the best options for you. Many cancer centers have social workers, counselors, support groups and psychologists who specialize in helping cancer patients manage anxiety and stress during cancer treatment.

There are support resources directly available to cancer patients - see Local Organizations below.

Self-help stress management strategies may include: exercising regularly, spending time outside, scheduling social activities, eating well, getting plenty of sleep, joining a support group, taking time to relax daily, doing things you enjoy, writing in a journal, or learning a new hobby. Some patients want to figure out ways to cope on their own, when possible. Many people with cancer have found that learning and practicing relaxation or imagery exercises (see below) has helped them cope with pain and stress. You can also take a stress reducing yoga class or listen to a relaxation DVD, CD or podcast, or find other relaxation tools online or in your home or spiritual community.

Relaxation techniques may be used alone or along with other types of treatment. Some of the following methods may be done with little guidance. Others may require the help of an instructor.

- Deep breathing. Done slowly for a few breaths in and out, this way of breathing can be done anywhere, anytime to reduce the body's natural response of fight or flight to a threat or unknown experience.
- Progressive muscle relaxation. This is a technique that involves lightly tensing one muscles group after another beginning at the toes or the head and slowly relaxing those muscles.
- Guided imagery. This technique uses your imagination to direct the mind's attention on a peaceful scene that generates a sense of calm and safety.
- Meditation strengthens your mind's ability to maintain attention to the sensory experiences occurring within the present moment. Meditation helps redirect distressing thoughts about the past and future uncertainty.
- Hypnosis may useful for guided relaxation, intense concentration, and focused attention as a means to relax.
- Biofeedback technique uses painless electrical sensors called electrodes to provide a visual representation of how the body is reacting to experiences and environment (e.g. heart rate, changes to body temperature, etc)
- Yoga. This technique uses breathing and posture exercises to promote relaxation.

Above content adapted from: <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/feelings/anxiety-distress-pdq> and <https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/anxiety> and <https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/managing-stress>

Local Organizations providing support for anyone impacted by cancer:

UnityPoint Health Cancer Support Services	Downtown Peoria	https://www.unitypoint.org/peoria/services-cancer.aspx	309-672-4224
OSF St. Francis Cancer Support Services	Downtown Peoria	https://www.osfhealthcare.org/saint-francis/services/cancer/cancer-support-services/	309-308-0200
Hult Center for Health Living	Central Peoria	https://www.hulthealthy.org/	309-692-6650

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Anxiety, Fear, and Depression](#)
- [NIH, Learning to Relax](#)
- [NIH, Adjustment to Cancer: Anxiety and Distress \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Anxiety](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Anxiety and Cancer](#)
- [NCCN, Patient and Caregiver Resources, Advocacy and Support Groups](#)

Información Española

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Cómo hacer frente al cáncer](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Adaptación al cáncer: ansiedad y sufrimiento \(PDQ®\)–Versión para pacientes](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Técnicas de relajación y prácticas de la mente y el cuerpo: cómo pueden ayudarle a sobrellevar el cáncer](#)