



Everyone deals with day-to-day stresses of work, family, etc. Added to these you now have the stress of dealing with the diagnosis of cancer and its treatments. You may need to consider additional methods to help you cope. Being an active partner in your health care can often alleviate the stress involved with not knowing what to expect. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Set realistic goals. Make choices regarding treatments, how you spend your time, how you relate to other people and how you cope.

What are the signs of stress?

- › **Physical:** change in appetite, tension, fatigue, problems with sleeping, digestive upsets, restlessness.
- › **Emotional:** anxiety, frustration, 'the blues', mood swings, irritability, depression.
- › **Spiritual:** loss of meaning, unforgiving, loss of direction, cynicism, loss of interest.
- › **Mental:** forgetfulness, poor concentration, negative attitude, boredom, negative self talk.
- › **Relational:** isolation, loneliness, lashing out, distrust, fewer contacts with family and friends.

What can you do to help?

- › **Reducing stress and tension in your life** can help you better cope with your illness and treatments.
- › **Exercise is important** for physical and mental health. It can be fun, relaxing and have a significant impact on your recovery. Studies show exercise can stimulate the immune system, increase positive outlook, help reverse depression and give you a sense of being in charge of your life. Begin a regular exercise program with something simple and enjoyable such as walking. Gradually increase your activity as you are able.
- › **Eat a healthy diet.** Think in terms of eating healthy; review the tips on nutrition.
- › **Rest is also important.** Some tips for a good night sleep include:
 - Establish a regular time to go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even if you had trouble sleeping the night before. This helps to 'train yourself' and may take time, so don't give up.
 - Your bedroom should provide maximum comfort and minimum distraction. When you get into bed, turn off the lights and try to sleep, relaxation techniques may help. Determine what your optimal amount of sleep is and try to get that each night. Your requirement may not change with illness, even if you feel more fatigued.
 - Do not drink caffeine-containing beverages i.e. coffee, tea, colas before bedtime.
 - Do not eat late in the evening or have heavy, spicy food. Eat lighter and earlier then have a small snack a little while before bedtime.
 - Do not lie awake in bed for a long time. If you can't fall asleep in about 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing before trying again.
 - If your doctor has prescribed a sleep medication, follow his/her instructions. Do not change the dose up or down without your doctors instructions.
- › **Try complementary therapies.** You can try yoga, meditation, music or relaxation exercises. Ask your health care team for further information about these helpful programs.

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What can you do to help?

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- › **Communicate with your healthcare team.** Don't be afraid to ask for help and suggestions.
 - › **Do things that add purpose and pleasure to your life.** Get involved in community or volunteer activities, get back to doing your hobbies, participate in recreational activities, visit with family and friends and live each day.
 - › **Improve psychological coping skills.** Develop a realistic attitude, communicate your feelings, accept yourself, be assertive, build and use a support system, join a support group.
 - › **Consider seeking professional help** if other methods don't seem to be working. Remember you have a team of people on your side with lots of information to help you get through this time in your life. You are not alone!!
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