

How to Manage your Anxiety

What is cancer-related anxiety?

It is a feeling of worry, fear or being nervous. It can come and go. Things like starting treatment or waiting for test results can make anxiety worse. Anxiety is normal for patients and families coping with cancer. It often goes away on its own within days. If your anxiety lasts longer than a few days, you may need help to manage it.

What causes cancer-related anxiety?

It may be caused by:

- Depression
- Waiting for test results
- Fear of cancer coming back, suffering or dying
- Worrying about money, your job and other practical things
- An anxiety disorder you had before cancer
- Feeling like you have no control over your life
- Having new symptoms that scare you
- Feeling badly from side-effects like nausea or pain
- Medications like steroids or some anti-nausea medications
- Finding out that you have cancer
- Nutrition problems



What can I do to help my anxiety?

Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better and less alone. Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener. Join a cancer support program to share stories with other people.

Face your fears

Anxiety can cause you to avoid people or situations that make you feel anxious. This is called 'avoidance behaviour'. Never avoid tests, treatments, or information sessions with your health care team. Tell your health care team if you are anxious.

Focus on things that make you feel better

Think about the positive parts of your life and things you can control. Spend time with people who make you laugh and avoid negative people who cause stress. Feel grateful for the things and people that bring you joy.

Improve your sleep

Getting good sleep can give you more energy and help you feel better emotionally. Do relaxing activities like reading or listening to music before going to bed.

Exercise and take care of your body

Exercise is a good way to help your anxiety and improve your mood. Choose an activity you like that suits your health and fitness level. Start slowly and go at your own pace. You can exercise at any time during or after treatment. Always talk to your health care team about how to exercise safely.

Eat well	A balanced diet can help you feel more energetic and positive. Ask your health care team to refer you to a registered dietitian. A dietitian can help you find ways to help you feel better.
Avoid alcohol and quit smoking	Alcohol makes people feel more down and have more anxiety. Even small amounts of alcohol can affect the way you feel. The nicotine in cigarettes can also make anxiety worse. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about making a plan that is right for you.
Make lists of calming, enjoyable and useful activities	When you feel anxious, get your list and choose an activity. Include things you enjoy, like going for a walk, watching your favourite TV shows, or taking a bath. Also add your appointments and chores. Doing these activities will help you feel in control.
Try relaxation activities	These activities may help you relax and manage your feelings and stress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness meditation training • Massage • Yoga • Acupuncture • Music or art therapy • Hypnosis • Deep breathing • Guided imagery
Get counseling to help you cope	With professional counseling, you can learn different ways of thinking and acting to help you cope with your anxiety. Talk to your health care team about seeing a psychosocial oncology professional, like a psychologist or social worker.
Take prescribed medications	If your anxiety does not get better, you may need to take medication to control it. There are two types of medication used for anxiety: anti-anxiety and anti-depressants. Ask your health care team if medication is right for you.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team right away, go to your nearest emergency room or call 911 if:

- Your anxiety is so bad that you are thinking about harming or killing yourself.
- You experience sudden shortness of breath, dizziness or a fast heartbeat that is new (this may be anxiety but could also be a sign of an urgent medical problem).

For more information, talk to your health care team or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms

