



# Helping yourself



## This information offers suggestions that may help you care for yourself when you have a cancer diagnosis.

### Take care of yourself

When your body tells you it is tired, listen to it. For example, rest, lie down during the day or go to bed early.

Take control by choosing carefully what you do when you are very tired.

Do something that you enjoy, like going for a bike ride – it can be a good distraction.

Regular exercise, without overdoing it, may help prevent low moods, depression and tiredness.

Develop a plan to pace yourself. Space activities out over the week. Plan rest periods between activities. A rest can recharge you and allow your body some time to rebalance.

While you are recovering from treatment, allow others to help you with tasks, such as house work or mowing lawns. Sometimes it can be difficult to accept help. Your family and friends appreciate being asked to help you with practical tasks as it helps them feel useful.

### How to manage physical symptoms

Symptoms such as pain can be controlled. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

Drink plenty of fluid every day.

Eat a balanced diet of fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals and protein, such as fish, chicken and milk.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, try relaxation exercises, a warm bath, a milky drink or music.

Sleeping tablets can be helpful in the short term. Discuss this option with your doctor.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

If you smoke, there is lots of support available to help you quit. How to manage physical symptoms

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### If you are feeling down

Feeling down is natural when you have a serious illness.

You may:

- have difficulty sleeping
- wake up early
- find life offers you little pleasure any more
- feel miserable or irritable
- eat less or more
- have trouble concentrating
- lose interest in sex
- feel anxious, on edge or have panic attacks.

These feelings may come and go or may last from a few days to months.

### What you can do to help yourself

Your cancer is not your fault. Don't be hard on yourself or your family.

Help yourself feel better by setting small goals.

Make time every day to do something you enjoy. It may be exercising, being outside, listening to your favourite music, watching funny DVDs, having a massage or chatting to a friend.

Talk with someone else who has experienced cancer. Call **0800 CANCER (226 237)** and ask about Cancer Connect. You may wish to attend a cancer support group where you will meet others who have cancer. You can also contact your local Cancer Society for details.

Try relaxation techniques, such as yoga or meditation.

Counselling may help and can also teach simple techniques to gain control over a low mood, depression, anxiety and fear. Discuss this with your doctor or phone your local Cancer Society.



## How to manage fear, anxiety and panic attacks

It's normal to feel frightened or anxious at times when you have cancer. You might worry about what will happen in the future. Fear and anxiety can have physical effects and you may have feelings of being hot or cold, feel butterflies in your stomach, and/or feel your heart racing. Some people may feel tense and be unable to concentrate.

Some people experience panic attacks and these are very different to being worried. A panic attack can happen suddenly and for no apparent reason. You may find it hard to breathe, or feel dizzy or faint. Panic attacks feel awful but they are generally not dangerous to your health. A panic attack may only happen once and have no lasting effect, but frequent attacks can begin to affect your quality of life. Most people feel better when they know what to expect and learning about cancer and its treatment can help you cope. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any concerns.

If you feel a panic attack coming on, try to distract yourself, for example ring a friend or listen to music. It can also help to take slow, deep breaths or do relaxation exercises. If you are having a great deal of anxiety, see your doctor or counsellor. Staff on the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)** can also offer more suggestions and information about dealing with panic attacks.