

Finding Emotional Support for Long-term Illness

Researchers have made great strides in treating patients with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML). Because of the effectiveness of targeted treatments like imatinib mesylate (Gleevec®) and dasatinib (SPRYCEL®), for some patients CML is similar to having a chronic illness. Their condition is managed well, and they live with it for a long time. While this offers increased hope for people diagnosed with CML, a long-term illness presents its own set of emotional challenges.

Here are some helpful hints for managing the emotional challenges of coping with CML over the long term:

Develop good communication with your health care team. Being able to talk easily and comfortably with the members of your health care team, such as your doctor, nurse or social worker, goes a long way in helping you feel more in control. Remember that you, too, are a key member of this team. Taking an active role in your medical care gives you access to information and helps you feel more involved. Preparing a list of questions before your appointments is one way to make sure all your concerns are getting addressed. For more suggestions, see CancerCare's fact sheet, "Doctor, Can We Talk? Tips for Communicating With Your Health Care Team."

Stay in touch with the people who comfort you. Family and friends, whether they live next door or far away, are important members of your team. The practical help they provide on low-energy days, and the comfort they bring you with their love and concern, can be considered a form of "treatment." Sometimes it's hard to ask for or accept help. You may worry that you'll be a bother or burden, but family and friends don't see it that way. They usually just want to help and be involved. If that's the case, let them – it's reassuring for them and good for your health. Visits, phone calls, letters and emails are all good ways to keep in touch and get support from those who care about you.

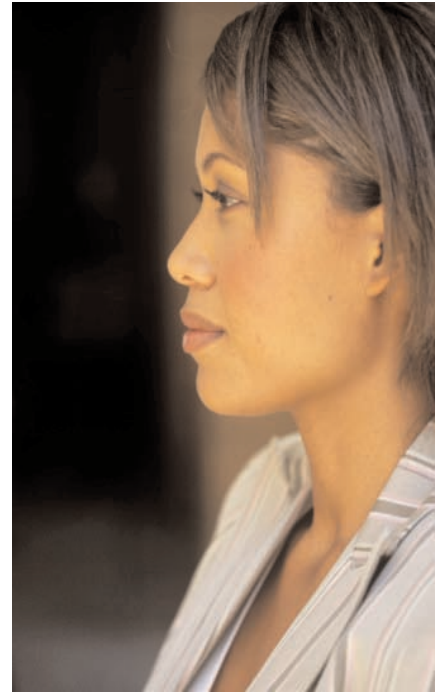


Acknowledge your emotions. A chronic illness might make it necessary for you to adjust the plans you had for yourself, and this can affect you emotionally. For example, people sometimes struggle with feelings of sadness or worry as they think about facing the future with a long-term illness. A support group connects you with others in similar situations who can share how they are coping. Individual counseling is also available to help you figure out how to live as full and active life as possible with a chronic medical condition. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers lead support groups and provide individual counseling free of charge.

(over)

Draw strength from your spiritual side. Strength comes from many different sources. One place people often turn to when coping with illness is spirituality, which can refer to one's religious beliefs, faith and/or life philosophy. Spirituality is about finding purpose and comfort in your own personal understanding of the meaning of life. Examples of activities that let you explore your spiritual side include prayer, meditation and reading sacred texts.

Invest in your own resilience. Resilience is the ability to manage whatever might come your way. Having a good support system is part of being resilient, but so is being good to yourself. Try to do small things to take care of yourself every day. Read a good book, buy yourself a small gift, watch a funny movie or listen to your favorite music. These may sound like luxuries, but pampering yourself in little ways goes a long way in helping you adjust to life with CML. Treating yourself right and finding new ways to enjoy life will help you accommodate any changes CML may bring.



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers understand the emotional challenges of coping with cancer. We'll meet with you in person, online or by telephone to help you find ways of maintaining the best quality of life possible during and after treatment for CML. CancerCare offers individual counseling, support groups, financial help and educational materials – all completely free of charge.

CancerCare's CML Series was made possible by a charitable contribution from Bristol-Myers Squibb.



CANCERCARE®

Help and Hope

National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

© 2007 Cancer Care, Inc.