



CANCERcare®

1-800-813-HOPE (4673)

Email info@cancerca.org

Web www.cancerca.org

Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices: How They Can Help You Cope With Cancer

Cancer and its treatment can be stressful for people with cancer and their caregivers. Relaxation techniques and other mind/body practices can help calm your mind and sharpen your ability to focus. These techniques offer creative ways to reduce stress caused by cancer and to maintain inner peace. For example, some people with cancer and caregivers use these techniques to help them relax as they wait for treatments or test results.



Here are some techniques that can help you cope with the challenges of cancer:

DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

At the core of life is breath. Laughing and sighing are the body's natural ways of getting us to breathe deeply. That is why we often feel calmer or rejuvenated after these experiences. Anxiety and stress can make us take short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing, which does not allow enough oxygen to enter our bodies, can make us even more anxious.

Try this four-step breathing exercise. It can be done anywhere, anytime:

1. Take in a deep breath from your diaphragm (this is the muscle between your lungs and abdomen).
2. Hold the breath for several seconds – however long is comfortable for you – and then exhale slowly.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 two more times.
4. Afterwards, relax for a moment and let yourself feel the experience of being calm.

MEDITATION

Repetitive prayers are a form of meditation. Two other traditional forms of meditation include “one-pointed” and “two-pointed” meditation:

One-pointed meditation focuses on a word or sound called a *mantra*. Many people create their own mantra from an affirming word, such as “peace,” “love” or “hope.” Once you choose a mantra, find a safe, quiet place and repeat it to yourself during 15- to 20-minute sittings.

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The goal is to relax the mind, which has a natural tendency to jump from one idea to the next – and from one worry to the next. Do not try to force your mind back to your mantra when you notice it has wandered. Simply guide it back gently, accepting that it will stray again.

Two-pointed meditation is also called “mindful” or “insight” meditation. With this technique, you relax your mind by focusing on your breath. As your mind jumps around, practice “non-judgmental awareness” – simply observe the pattern of your thoughts and gently guide them back to focus on your breath.

Non-judgmental awareness allows you to separate yourself from emotions and sensations rather than getting pulled into them. One benefit of this type of meditation is that you can practice it while seated quietly or when doing daily activities.

GUIDED IMAGERY

This stress-reducing technique combines deep breathing and meditation. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful scene or setting, perhaps from a memory. Once you are relaxed, you can create a “wakeful dream” in which, for example, you envision pain being washed away or your body becoming stronger.

These exercises are often accompanied by “ambient” sounds, usually music or sounds from nature, such as waterfalls or ocean waves. Sometimes just listening to ambient sounds is enough to relax your mind and briefly transport you emotionally to a place in which you feel safer and more secure.

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare’s professional oncology social workers are available to help you develop your own strategies for reducing stress and maintaining inner peace as you cope with cancer. We also provide education, support groups, financial help, and referrals – *all completely free of charge*. To learn more, call **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancercares.org.



FINDING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Some cancer treatment centers have programs to teach people with cancer and caregivers the basics of relaxation or meditation.

There are also a number of easy-to-follow educational books and audio-recordings on this subject that provide step-by-step instructions.

Your nurse or oncology social worker may also be familiar with relaxation exercises and mind/body practices, or he or she may be able to refer you to others who can help you learn these techniques.



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