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Coping With Cancer

The words “you have cancer” are frightening and overwhelming. From the moment of diagnosis, life will never be the same. In addition to the physical difficulties, there are emotional and financial issues that you must learn to manage. Without a doubt, cancer turns your world upside down.

CancerCare helps people understand the challenges that are a part of living with cancer, and provides the tools you need to cope better with the emotional, financial, and medical aspects of the cancer experience.

Dealing with the Emotional Impact

It’s important to remember that everyone experiences some kind of sadness or helplessness when confronted with cancer—and that many people have come through these experiences.

Life will never be the same after cancer, but it doesn’t mean you stop living. There are many things you can do to handle the emotional impact of cancer.

- **Keep track of your feelings.** Many people find it helpful to keep a journal or record their emotions through photography, drawing, painting, music, or other expressions.
- **Share your feelings with people close to you.** Sometimes, caregivers and people with cancer feel as if they are a “burden” to their loved ones by “complaining” about their problems. Remember that you are entitled to every emotion you have. Don’t be afraid to share them with the people close to you.
- **Seek individual counseling with a professional.** Oncology social workers, **psychologists**, and **psychiatrists** help you sort through your many complex emotions. CancerCare provides free individual counseling to people with cancer and caregivers across the country.
- **Join a support group or “buddy” program.** Talk with someone who has had a similar experience. Support groups help you feel less isolated. They provide reassurance, suggestions, and insight, allowing you to share similar concerns with your peers in a safe and supportive environment. CancerCare provides free, professionally run support groups on the telephone, online, and face to face.
- **Tell your doctor and nurse about your feelings.** Doctors understand, better than ever before, that patients are concerned about good quality of life as they go through treatment. Sometimes, people benefit from a referral for counseling or a medicine for anxiety or depression.

Learning About Medicine

One of the biggest challenges for people with cancer is learning all the complex medical aspects of the disease. Below are tips to help:

- **As a health care consumer, it is your right to have a good health care team** that listens to your questions and concerns. Get to know all the members of your team and learn how each one helps you.
- **Identify one person on the medical team** who is in charge of your care and “funnel” all information through that person.
- As you visit different websites or hear about new treatments, **write down questions** as they arise. At your next doctor’s visit, bring these questions with you so you can keep track of what you need to know.
- **During your doctor’s visits, take notes** or ask a family member to take notes. Also ask your doctor if you can tape-record your visits. This will allow you to go back later and listen carefully to all the information presented by your doctor.
- **Ask your doctor to recommend books, brochures, and websites.** For tips on evaluating websites, see the box on the next page.
- **Find trustworthy educational programs** about your cancer. CancerCare offers more than 50 free Telephone Education Workshops every year that provide people with reliable information from experts on a range of cancer diagnoses and topics.

Finding Financial Help

Financial stress often causes emotional stress. Because cancer treatment often means years of medical care, financial concerns can influence major life decisions about work, housing, and school. Here are some of the things you can do:

- **Talk to your insurance company.** Many companies will assign a **case manager** to help you work through insurance concerns, clarify benefits, and suggest ways to get other health services.
- **Talk to your medical care providers about your needs.** Many treatment centers have social workers who help you sort through financial concerns. CancerCare social workers can also help you.
- **Find out which government programs (entitlements) you are eligible for and apply promptly.** You can order a free fact sheet from CancerCare called “Getting to Know Your Entitlements” that outlines all the different sources of help available.
- **Learn how private organizations can help you.** Many pharmaceutical companies have programs to help low-income patients pay for prescription drugs. See our resource guide on page 19.
- **Talk directly to your creditors** if you expect to—or have already—run out of money and cannot meet your daily living expenses. Many utility and mortgage companies will work out a payment plan with you *before* a crisis develops.