



REDUCING STRESS TO PREVENT CANCER

A disease such as cancer is often one of the most stressful experiences of a person's life. Coping with cancer can be more challenging with added stress from work, family, or financial concerns. Everyday stress can also make coping with a cancer diagnosis more difficult.

Stress has not been shown to cause cancer. But chronic stress may weaken the immune system, causing other health problems and decreasing feelings of well-being.

TIPS FOR REDUCING STRESS

Stressors are sources of stress. Some stressors are predictable and, therefore, sometimes avoidable. You can often lower the amount of stress in your life by making small changes. Consider the following tips for reducing stress:

- Avoid scheduling conflicts. Use a day planner, your phone, or an online calendar to keep track of appointments and activities. When you schedule activities, allow plenty of time to finish 1 activity before starting the next.
- Be aware of your limits. If you do not have the time, energy, or interest, it is okay to politely decline when people ask you to take on tasks. Do not feel guilty over saying no.

- Ask for help. It is also good sense to ask family, friends, and coworkers for help. People are likely to offer their support, so think about particular tasks you need help with beforehand.
- Prioritise your tasks. Make a list of the things you routinely do, such as work and household chores. Rank these things by importance, considering the things you must do and the things that are most important to you.
- Break down tasks into smaller steps. Sometimes large tasks can be done in smaller steps. This process can make seemingly overwhelming problems easier to handle. For example, instead of spending an afternoon cleaning your entire house, tackle 1 or 2 rooms each day.
- Concentrate your efforts on things you can control. A stressor may be something you cannot change or control, even with the best planning. Traffic is one example. People who can remain flexible keep their stress low.

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Although you can try to reduce the number of stressors in your life, you cannot completely avoid stress. However, stress management strategies can help

you feel more relaxed and less anxious. The following are tips to help reduce stress:

- Exercise regularly. Moderate exercise such as a 30-minute walk several times a week can help lower stress.
- Spend time outside. If possible, take a walk outside in a park or other natural setting. Sunlight, fresh air, and the sounds of nature can help brighten a person's day.
- Schedule social activities. Make time to socialise with family or friends, as it is a good way to lower stress.
- Eat well. Maintaining a healthy diet and getting enough rest will give you more energy to deal with daily stressors.
- Get plenty of sleep. Life is busy and some people may think that sleep is indulgent. But sleep is essential to help the body stay healthy and heal. Try to get 7 or more hours of sleep each night.
- Join a support group. Support groups offer you the chance to talk about your feelings and fears with others who share and understand your experiences.
- Schedule daily relaxing time. Spend time doing an activity you find relaxing, such as reading a book, gardening, or listening to music.
- Do things you enjoy. Eat at your favourite restaurant or watch your favourite



television show. Laughter reduces stress, so consider seeing a funny movie or reading a humorous book to help cope with stress.

- Write in a diary. Writing about the stresses and events in your life provides a private way to express your feelings.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Many people learn and practice relaxation techniques to lower stress. You can learn most of them in a few sessions with a counselor. Many hospitals and cancer centers also have classes to teach patients relaxation techniques. Consider doing the following techniques daily or at specific stressful times, such as during a medical procedure:

- Relaxed or deep breathing. This involves deep, slow breathing while concentrating on filling the lungs and relaxing muscles.
- Mental imagery or visualisation. This helps you create peaceful and relaxing images in your mind.
- Progressive muscle relaxation. This technique involves tightening and then relaxing muscles. Most people start at either the toes or the head and progressively relax all the muscles across the body.

- Meditation. With this technique, you can learn to relax your mind and concentrate on an inner sense of calm.
- Biofeedback. This technique can teach you to relax and control your body's response to stress by paying attention to signals from the body.
- Yoga. Yoga focuses the mind on breathing and posture to promote relaxation and reduce fatigue.



