
Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation

Cancer and its treatment can be stressful—for you and your caregivers. Practicing mindfulness and relaxation can help calm your mind, reduce stress, and sharpen your ability to focus.

Mindfulness and relaxation are ways you can reduce stress and feel more peaceful.

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How mindfulness can help

Mindfulness is slowing down to pay attention to what's going on right here, right now. Some of the benefits of mindfulness are that it:

- Reduces stress, anxiety, and depression
- Increases positive emotions and enjoyment in daily life
- Encourages healthier eating habits
- Improves relationships
- Reduces parenting stress
- Helps people [quit smoking](#)¹

Mindfulness strategies

Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Enjoy simple pleasures

In our busy world, it can be hard to slow down and notice the little things. Here are a few ways to use mindfulness to stop and smell the roses.

Love your favorite things

Eat your favorite food. Turn off the TV, place the food in front of you, look at it, taste it, and smell it. Enjoy it!

Listen to your favorite song—or any music that you love!

Take a journey in your mind

Think of yourself at the beach or in a garden or the mountains—anywhere you want. Close your eyes and think about what it would feel like to be there right now. Enjoy every little thing about this beautiful place!

Take a walk outside

Walk slowly and really focus on being there. Notice what you see, hear, and smell.

Be mindful through stress and bad feelings

Sometimes we have thoughts that make us feel sad or stressed. Practicing mindfulness can help you work through these feelings.

Practice self-reflection

It's easy to let negative thoughts spiral out of control. When you are having negative thoughts or feelings, follow these five steps:

1. Stop and take a deep breath.
2. Ask yourself, what's really going on here?
3. Remind yourself that your thoughts are "just thoughts." Thoughts come and go. We all have thoughts but having a thought doesn't mean that it's true or that it will last forever.
4. Take another deep breath and move on with your day.
5. Do something nice for yourself. Go for a walk, take a bath, paint your nails, call a friend, go to a movie, or play with a child or a pet. Do whatever feels good to you.

Accept yourself and others

Do you ever notice that you're harder on yourself than you are on other people? Try to give yourself a break and treat yourself like you would treat a good friend.

Practice self-compassion

Whenever you're being hard on yourself, try to be a little kinder with these three steps:

1. Think about a time when things did not go the way you wanted, or a time when you felt like you said the wrong thing or messed up somehow. How did you feel? What were you telling yourself?
2. If this same thing happened to your closest friend, what would you say to them?
3. Even if it feels silly, try saying those things to yourself. Self-compassion means treating yourself like you would treat a good friend.

Take time for mindful moments

Take some time to do something that you enjoy, like a hobby. You'll have something else to think about instead of worrying about cancer.

Slow down and breathe

A great way to start practicing mindfulness is to set aside time (even 1 minute!) to slow down and breathe.

1. Find a quiet spot where you can be by yourself for a few minutes.
2. Sit down, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Notice your breath.
3. At some point (usually pretty quickly), other thoughts will pop up in your mind. That's ok! Just bring your attention back to your breath.
4. Focus on your breathing, right here, right now.

For help learning a focused breathing technique, watch this video:

Mindfulness Exercise 1 - Focused Breathing Technique

[Watch this video on YouTube](#) ²

Practice relaxation techniques

Many people with cancer have found that practicing relaxation techniques has helped

them cope with stress and feel less anxious. Try learning and practicing relaxation techniques to lower your stress.

Set aside about 5 to 10 minutes a day, if possible, to practice one or more of these relaxation exercises. You also may be able to do them during a stressful time, such as during a medical test or treatment.

Connect with your body's relaxation response

Take some time to let go of tension and clear your mind with this relaxation exercise.

1. Lie comfortably on your back or find a comfortable and quiet place to sit.
2. Close your eyes and breathe gently and naturally through your nose.
3. Relax all your muscles, starting at your toes and moving up to the top of your head.
4. Focus on your breathing.
5. Continue for 5 to 20 minutes.
6. When you are done, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and then with your eyes open. Wait a few minutes before standing up.

Practice deep conscious breathing

Deep breathing can help keep stress in check. This exercise can be done with your eyes closed or open wherever you happen to be.

1. Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit or lie down.
2. Relax your face, jaw, neck, and shoulders. Gently place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your belly button.
3. As you breathe in, allow the breath to expand your belly, chest, and lungs. As you breathe out, gently press your hands against your chest and belly to let out more air.
4. Focus on steady breathing.
5. Take your time.

For guided instruction of a more in-depth version of this breathing technique, watch this video:

Mindfulness Exercise 2 - Three-Part Breath

[Watch this video on YouTube](#) ³

Try progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation shows you how to relax your muscles through tension and release. This can help lower your overall tension and stress levels, and help you relax when you are feeling anxious. Practicing this exercise will help you learn what relaxation feels like, and to notice when you get tense during the day.

1. Plan to take about 15 minutes to do the exercise.
2. Find a quiet place where no one will disturb you.
3. First, apply muscle tension to a specific part of the body. Take a slow, deep breath and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 5 seconds.
4. After about 5 seconds, quickly relax the tensed muscles. Exhale as you let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. The muscles should feel loose as you relax them. It's very important for you to notice and focus on the difference between the tension and relaxation.
5. Stay relaxed for about 15 seconds, and then do the same thing for the next muscle group. Once you've gone through all of the muscle groups, take a moment to enjoy the relaxation.

For help learning progressive muscle relaxation, watch this video:

Mindfulness Exercise 3 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation

[Watch this video on YouTube](#) ⁴

You may also want to expand your mindfulness practice through focused meditation as described in this video:

Mindfulness Exercise 4 - Focused Meditation

[Watch this video on YouTube](#) ⁵

The following video is brought to you by Healing Works Foundation.

A Guided Meditation to Support a Healthy Immune System

Deepen your connection with your body with guided visuals and positive messages. This meditation exercise can be done when sitting or lying down. Listen to messages that will show you how your body protects your well-being.

[Watch on Vimeo](#) ⁶

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html
2. www.youtube.com/embed/Aiqll-aJkb0?origin=http%3A%2F%2Flocalhost%3A4502&hl=en&enablejsapi=1
3. www.youtube.com/embed/Ro82BQe8Cm8?origin=http%3A%2F%2Flocalhost%3A4502&hl=en&enablejsapi=1
4. www.youtube.com/embed/Jompdq3lxvQ?origin=http%3A%2F%2Flocalhost%3A4502&hl=en&enablejsapi=1
5. www.youtube.com/embed/Xcb6hzMp0LQ?origin=http%3A%2F%2Flocalhost%3A4502&hl=en&enablejsapi=1
6. vimeo.com/920113976/75b6b0deb1

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Mehta R, Sharma K, Potters L, Wernicke AG, Parashar B. Evidence for the role of mindfulness in cancer: Benefits and techniques. *Cureus*. 2019; e4629.

Carlson LE. Mindfulness in cancer care: Hype or help? *Ascopost.com*. www.ascopost.com/issues/july-10-2018/mindfulness-in-cancer-care/. Published July 18, 2018. Accessed November 30, 2020.

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