



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)  
info@cancercaare.org  
www.cancercaare.org

fact sheet

# COPING WITH ANXIETY ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

The spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in early March. By most accounts, those with a cancer diagnosis face higher risks of infection due to compromised immune systems resulting from the disease or its treatment. Understandably, this can be a source of anxiety for many. Here are some guidelines for managing your concerns.

## FACING NEW CHALLENGES

With the emergence of COVID-19, those with a cancer diagnosis and their caregivers have been forced to navigate an additional layer of fear and uncertainty. By taking time for yourself, maintaining your support networks, speaking with your health care team and staying informed, you can strengthen your resilience and capacity to cope.

## TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Self-care practices can lessen symptoms of anxiety. Prioritizing sleep, eating a balanced and nutritious diet and getting regular exercise within guidelines set by your treating health care team can work to improve mood and daily functioning. Other effective strategies include grounding techniques such as meditation, deep breathing and visualization. These techniques can provide significant relief from stress and anxiety, with the added benefit of being accessible anytime you want. For those new to these practices, there is comprehensive information and instruction available online through websites like HelpGuide.org or smart phone apps such as Headspace. Additional ideas can be found in CancerCare's fact sheet, "Managing the Emotional Impacts of Social Distancing."



## REACH OUT TO FAMILY, FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES

Social connections play an essential role in coping. Regular contact with loved ones provides an outlet for relieving stress and sharing feelings. It contributes to a vital sense of normalcy, added comfort and a stabilizing force when facing so much uncertainty. At a time when many health experts are advising "social distancing" as a way of limiting exposure to the coronavirus, there are still ways to connect with others. Phone calls, email, social media, FaceTime and other video chat apps help maintain bonds with loved ones. Existing social networks can be further strengthened by joining a support group or engaging in counseling. Many hospitals and treatment facilities provide supportive services as do non-profit organizations.

(over)

At CancerCare, free individual counseling and professionally-led support groups are offered to those with a cancer diagnosis and their caregivers anywhere in the country through telephone and online-based services.

## **SPEAK WITH YOUR TREATING HEALTH CARE TEAM**

Ground yourself as much as possible in the precautions your health care team is taking. By now, many hospitals and treatment centers have disseminated basic information to patients and families about any changes they have made. Many facilities have updated their patient and visitor policies to reduce transmission risks and protect the health and safety of staff, patients and others. You may no longer be able to bring visitors with you, for example. Regardless of how these updates are transmitted, whether via email, handouts or posted throughout the facility, take care to review this content and ensure you understand it fully. Be sure to review any questions or concerns with your health care team. Make sure you know what to do should any new medical symptoms arise. Anxiety thrives on uncertainty, and a plan will help alleviate extra concerns surrounding the care itself.

Your health care team may have adopted the practice of telemedicine, which is when appointments are conducted remotely by way of video-conferencing technologies. On a case-by-case basis, your doctors may elect to alter your treatment in order to reduce physical contact within clinical settings. Keep your team apprised of any changes in your circumstances and coordinate with them to ensure your personal safety is balanced with the best possible care.

## **STAY INFORMED AND SEEK TRUSTED SOURCES**

It can be tempting to look up symptoms online or become absorbed in the details from the latest news cycle. While staying informed is certainly important, try to focus on reliable sources of medical information such as the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). These sites provide important developments about the coronavirus without the need to follow the intense daily news cycles.

In this vein, consider limiting your access to news about the coronavirus. While it is vital to keep apprised of changes in movement and travel and new information about our understanding of the coronavirus, take breaks from distressing media coverage when needed and focus on the things that bring joy and meaning.

### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/cancercare](https://www.facebook.com/cancercare)

**Instagram:** [@cancercarepics](https://www.instagram.com/cancercarepics)

**Twitter:** [@cancercare](https://twitter.com/cancercare)

*Edited by Caroline Edlund, LCSW-R*

*This fact sheet is supported by a contribution from GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly, Novartis Oncology and Seattle Genetics.*



**CANCERcare®**

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

© 2020 CancerCare®