

**Cancer often brings anxiety and stress, which can make testing, treatment and healing harder to manage. Techniques to relax and be mindful can help. This fact sheet covers:**

- The benefits of mindfulness and relaxation
- Tips on becoming present and mindful
- Breathing exercises
- Additional resources



## How Mindfulness and Relaxation Can Help

Mindfulness is slowing down and being aware of your thoughts, feelings and where you are. It often requires removing other considerations from your mind, including about the past or future. This can help you relax and give your brain a rest.

Evidence shows that mindfulness can reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure and improve sleep. All of these things contribute to better health outcomes and quality of life.



## Ways to Become Present and Mindful

It can be very hard to find inner peace and calm when you are stressed. Do what you can and try not to force things. It may help to set time aside for this activity.

- Enjoy your favorite things. Eat your favorite meal or listen to good music. Try this without distractions, only focusing on what you are doing right now.
- Take a walk. Concentrate on the sounds, sights and smells of the things around you, whether in a familiar place or a new one.
- Meditate or pray. You can relax your mind by repeating the same prayer or a comforting word, such as “peace,” “love” or “now.”

During these activities, your mind may wander. Do not stress if you feel you are doing things ‘incorrectly.’ What is important is overall peace and calm. If you are distracted, gently remember what you are doing and see if you can return to a state of relaxation.



## Breathing Exercises

Laughing, crying, yawning and sighing are the body's natural ways of reconnecting us with our breath. That is why we sometimes feel calmer after doing these things. Anxiety and stress cause us to take shorter, shallower breaths which can then make us feel even more anxious.

### Try this simple breathing exercise:

- Take a breath and feel your belly expand.
- Hold the breath for a few seconds, or however long is comfortable for you, and then exhale slowly.
- Repeat steps 1 and 2, slowly.
- Relax for a moment and explore the experience of feeling calm.

As you do this, try to simply observe your thoughts without deciding whether they are good or bad. Gently guide your attention back to the present. Focus on your inhaled and exhaled air again. Be centered only in the moment. This can help calm your body and mind.



## Finding Additional Resources

Other mind/body practices include yoga, tai chi or other methods. These techniques are often taught at health clubs, YMCAs, senior centers and other places around the country. Many cancer treatment centers have programs to teach people with cancer and caregivers the basics of relaxation or meditation. Ask your medical team or social worker whether these services are offered.

In addition, there are a number of easy-to-follow educational books, websites and audio recordings on this subject that provide step-by-step instructions. A simple internet search can be a great place to start!

### 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 resource navigation, 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)**.

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