8 Healthy Ways to Relax When You Have Cancer

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Relaxation Techniques for Cancer Patients

Living with cancer isn't easy, and it's certainly not relaxing. Stress can be a daily challenge, and although it can seem insurmountable at times, you need to get a handle on the problem before it complicates your health even more.

Cancer leaves your body more vulnerable to stress, and its devastating impact. It's crucial you relax in order to protect yourself from further damage and keep your immunity up. If you're beginning to notice the signs of stress (like a sore jaw from teeth clenching, loss of libido or skin problems), take these tips to decompress quickly and easily.

Satisfy Food Cravings Right Way

It's no secret that stress can lead you right to the pantry: once your cortisol levels begin to rise, food cravings are sure to follow, often in the form of a sweet tooth or an urge to fill up on carbohydrates. A bit of an indulgence can be good for your mood, and even your blood sugar — provided you choose a healthier treat.

In order to keep your body strong and energetic in your fight against cancer, opt for naturally sweet or starchy foods when you can't wait out the craving. Sweet potatoes are surprisingly comforting, combining sugar and starch in healthy amounts, along with a host of vitamins. Other sugary treats to consider are oranges (vitamin C can help return cortisol levels back to normal), and dark chocolate, with its feel-good flavonoids.

Learn to Say No

If you're a people-pleaser, you have some very noble virtues. You're probably compassionate, encouraging and kind. On the other hand, your own comfort can fall by the wayside: by taking on every task that comes your way, you could be jeopardizing your energy levels and emotional balance.

When your energy is low or your schedule is full, it's perfectly fine to say "no" to a request. It can be difficult to turn someone down, so if you're not comfortable refusing altogether, you can adjust the task into something you *can* handle. Otherwise, just agree to a part of it — your body will thank you.

Concentrate on Things You Can Control

When you feel like you're losing control, your body and mind can go into survival mode, triggering the stress response and keeping you tense. However, trying harder to control every variable in your life isn't the way forward.

There's one fact to keep in the front of your mind: nobody can control everything. Despite your best efforts to organize your life, you're bound to run into roadblocks like weather, traffic, and other people's schedules. Learn

to be more flexible, so you can save yourself the futile worry and energy.

Make Time for Things You Enjoy

When you're juggling doctor visits, remembering medication, and managing the rest of your obligations, your hobbies and interests can suffer. Not only will this make for a pretty mundane life, it could also compound your stress.

Laughter is a known stress-reliever, but focusing on something fun can have a similarly calming effect. Or if you enjoy writing – consider trying cancer journaling! Whatever you really enjoy doing, find time for it at least a couple of times a week.

Negative thinking triggers your brain to raise blood pressure and cortisol levels, but it's difficult to feel bad about yourself when you're doing something you love.

Ask for Help When You Need It

You are not a charity case, nor are you an invalid. You're a person, and people need help from other people from time to time. Living with cancer, you might need to call on the people around you a bit more often than average, but that's nothing to be ashamed of.

A good way to get what you need without sounding too demanding is by making very specific requests before they need to be done. This way, you're giving people some time to prepare — and leaving no room for misinterpretation. Lean on loved ones for high-energy tasks like grocery shopping, walking the dog or babysitting. That little favor can help you save a lot of energy.

Prioritize

Usually, all the things you have to do aren't as pressing as they may seem at first. Sit down with a pen and paper and make a physical to-do list, then rank each item by importance. Be sure to consider the things that are time sensitive, but also the health commitments you've made to yourself.

It's natural to shuffle your priorities now and then, as your cancer treatment changes or when a different element enters into your routine. Be receptive to adjusting your priorities as needed. On days where you know you can't get through your list, do the top tasks, and then rest assured that everything else can wait.

Learn the "Relaxing Breath"

Breath work is an important part of the yoga tradition; different sorts of breathing can summon different sensations and mindsets. One particularly helpful technique for stress relief is the 4-8-7 breath.

Sit, stand or lie down in a comfortable position, and hold the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, right behind the base of your front teeth. Holding your tongue here, breathe in through your nose to the count of four, hold that breath to the count of seven, then exhale out your mouth by pursing your lips and puffing out your cheeks to the count of eight. Your exhale will be audible, and your tongue stays up against your teeth for the entire exercise.

Warm Up

A warm bath or shower can bring almost instant relief to tense muscles and built-up stress. Certainly, sitting or standing still can physically calm your body, but the warmth itself also seems to do a lot of good. Every noticed how sipping on a warm cup of tea or coffee can bring you down to ground?

Using warmth in other ways can stimulate your body to quell the stress response, too. Your nervous system

directs blood flow to your major muscles at the first sign of fear or anxiety, which leaves your extremities feeling cold. Rubbing your hands together rapidly and firmly will warm them, and that tells the nervous system — and its stress response — to calm down.

Stress can creep into your life at any time, but if you have a variety of stress-busting techniques at the ready, you'll be able to stay in control. Make sure you regularly practice your relaxing breathing, being positive and generous to yourself, and simplifying your life in new and sustainable ways. When you attack your stress from every angle, you're more likely to squash it quickly.