How to Prevent and Manage Cancer-Related Stress

by AMY MANLEY

The Relationship Between Stress and Cancer

Stress has a bigger impact on cancer than many realize. When you live with cancer, it causes stress to occur on a number of levels, and likewise, stress can take a toll on the body.

When you have cancer, it is more important than ever to reduce the level of stress. By learning more about the relationship between stress and cancer, you can better understand why reducing your stress levels through one of the following techniques is vital.

How Does Stress Impact the Body?

When you have cancer, your body may feel compromised, and stress takes a much larger toll on it. The wear stress takes on the body is serious. It can lead to a variety of health problems, as it makes the organs work harder.

While the body can manage low levels of stress, when the body is under high levels of stress for a prolonged period of time, stress hormones build up in the body and display themselves in several different ways. The body experiences tension, strain, high blood pressure, and your equilibrium becomes out of whack.

According to experts, stress is the cause behind many of the health problems seen today.

What Are the Signs of Stress?

As mentioned, when your body is under some stress, your body can work through it, but when you have cancer it’s important that you keep your stress levels very low, and prevent high levels of stress altogether.

The first step to preventing stress is learning how to recognize when you are under it. Not many people recognize the beginning of stress, only when they have begun to feel completely stressed out. However, your body provides you with cues that you are under stress that you need to recognize.

The following signs are indicators of stress:

- Grinding or clenching the teeth, which only occurs at night. This could lead to a sore jaw.
- Worsening of skin conditions, such as rosea, or breaking out in acne. You may have suffered from an acne breakout during short periods of stress, but when stress is persistent and at high levels, they breakouts and aggravated skin conditions can be extreme.
- Sickness. Stress has a big impact on your immune system, causing you to suffer from sickness more frequently.
- Loss of hair. While hair loss is a normal part of life, you can suffer from extreme hair loss.

How to Cope With Stress and Cancer

Cancer is restricting but the degree of your confinement is dictated by you. Having a plan to reduce stress and improve overall well-being will help your process. Here's how you can cope with cancer and stress:

- **Set up success.** Stress makes it harder to take care of you and not taking care of yourself increases stress. Even if it seems that your body is against you, make yourself the priority by making appropriate diet choices, allowing enough time to get eight hours of sleep each night and exercising more often. These three will improve your physical health and boost your energy throughout the day. More importantly, the influence on your mental health is incredible. Your moods will be less depressed while your concentration and problem-solving skills improve.
- **Maintain your identity.** People respond to cancer in unique ways. Fear and misunderstandings lead many to make rash or hasty decisions. Acknowledge and accept your situation. Find times to be vulnerable as well as selfish. Your life is changing but that does not mean that you need to change.
- **Explore your options for relaxation.** You know you need to relax and so do the people around you. Finding productive relaxations do not have to be challenging or expensive. Perhaps a pedicure or a tropical vacation would offer relaxation but the expense may be unaffordable. Don't give up on relaxation too quickly. Free relaxation techniques begin with deep breathing and end at complex meditations. Completing multiple trials throughout the day for weeks at a time is the only way to know if the relaxation is a good fit for you. The vast majority of people achieve some benefit from relaxation. You should be no different.

- **Subtract negatives.** Surely, the stress would be less if the cancer vanished. This is unlikely, though. Instead, focus your efforts by taking a practical inventory of your stressors and identifying ones that create the largest unwanted impact. Work to eliminate or modify these to reduce stress. Be cautious, though. Spending too many resources trying to change something that is unchangeable only leads to increased stress. Choose your battles wisely and seek out supports to find success.
- **Add positives.** You can never eliminate all negatives. Adding positives helps find balance and then tip the scales in your favor. If your positives can outweigh the negatives, you will feel more empowered and optimistic about the future. Both behavioral and cognitive positives have benefited. Rather than being glued to the couch, go for a walk outside or meet a friend for dinner. Discover new ways to compliment yourself and see life as hopeful. The sense of accomplishment you receive will shrink your stress.

Conclusion

Doctors give you many recommendations to care for your body but nurturing your mind and well-being is your job. Take on the challenge with hope and optimism. A healthy body is useless without a healthy mind to match.