

Anxiety

Note: My NM Care corner is not intended to replace clinical care or management by a healthcare provider. If you have a medical emergency, please contact your healthcare provider.

Anxiety is common among patients and families who are coping with cancer. However, it's important to manage anxiety if it becomes overwhelming or gets in the way of your ability to manage your day-to-day life. Sometimes anxiety can cause patients to miss check-ups with their doctors or delay treatment.

Anxiety means you have extra worry, can't relax, and feel tense or nervous. You may notice that:

- Your heart beats faster
- Your hands feel shaky
- You have a tight feeling in your throat and chest.
- You find it hard to concentrate or remember things.
- You have trouble sleeping
- You feel overwhelmed, fearful, or like "something bad" will happen
- You're flooded with anxious thoughts or concerns that are difficult to manage
- You start avoiding social situations or feeling irritable with family and friends

Common triggers of anxiety may include:

- Being screened for cancer
- Waiting for test results
- Hearing a cancer diagnosis
- Being treated for cancer
- Worrying about cancer
- Taking certain drugs such as corticosteroids, thyroxine, bronchodilators, and antihistamines, can cause restlessness, agitation, or anxiety.
- Withdrawing from habit-forming drugs: Withdrawal from alcohol, nicotine, opioids, or antidepressant medicine can cause agitation or anxiety.

An important thing to remember is that some medical conditions and medicines can feel like anxiety. If you're experiencing symptoms similar to anxiety, talk to your doctor. He or she can help you figure out what's going on, and what the best treatment approach is for you.

Self-Care Strategies

Listed below are ways to address anxiety through strategies you can try at home:

- Talk about your feelings and fears with someone you trust. Remember, it's ok and normal to feel anxious.
- Consider joining a support group. It may help to share your feelings and concerns with others who understand what you are going through.
- Avoid caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and energy drinks. Caffeine can make anxiety worse.
- Try to limit alcohol. Alcohol may help you temporarily relax but it can reduce sleep quality which can make anxiety worse.
- Use meditation, prayer, or other types of spiritual support.

- Try relaxation exercises such as meditation and deep breathing. For example, yoga uses breathing and posture exercises to promote relaxation.
- Being physically active can help with anxiety. Going for a 20-30 min walk is a great self-care strategy.
- Guided imagery. This technique uses your imagination to direct the mind's attention on a peaceful scene that generates a sense of calm and safety.
- Hypnosis may be useful for guided relaxation, intense concentration, and focused attention as a means to relax.

How Your Care Team can Help

If you're feeling anxious, talk with your doctor. Ask your doctor for a referral to see a licensed mental health care provider. There are many effective talk therapy treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy that have been shown to reduce anxiety.

Your doctor may also discuss the option of taking a prescription medication to help with how you are feeling. Moderate to severe anxiety may require medication. Conversation with you and your health care providers can determine if medication is right for you. Benzodiazepines are a commonly prescribed type of medication that can reduce anxiety.

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