Article Series Mental Health All

Need a lift? Eight tips to help care for your emotional well-being

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It’s normal to feel ups and downs when you are living with cancer. Older people are sometimes at greater risk of feeling down as they handle their diagnosis and go through treatment. Loss, other illnesses, social isolation and stress involving loved ones are just a few issues older people may face. Caregivers may also experience some of these issues, along with the stress that comes with caring for their loved one.

The good news is that there are simple habits you can use as part of your daily life to help give yourself a boost. Even just stopping to accept your feelings can have a positive impact on your mood.

Taking care of your emotional well-being

While a lot of cancer treatment talk is about keeping your body healthy, it's also important to take care of your emotional well-being. Here are some ideas that may help.

- **Keep your mind active**. Give your mind some exercise and have a little fun too. Activities such as reading a book, listening to an audio book or doing a puzzle can be just what you need to help shake off the blues or keep your mind busy while receiving treatment. You can search for "free games" online and find access to a number of games to keep your mind active. Also consider listening to recorded lectures or courses taught by professors or other educators. Check out your local community center to see if there are any lectures that you can attend online—many offer them for free!
- **Have some quiet time**. Sit and breathe in a quiet place—no TVs or cell phones—for a few minutes. This is sometimes called "meditation" or "mindfulness." You might find that by focusing your attention for a few minutes, you'll feel better. Imagine that you're placing the thought in a balloon or sailboat and then watch it float away. You can try this on your own, but there are also free websites and apps that offer guided meditation. Sometimes, just hearing a calm voice telling you to breathe in and breathe out can help you feel more relaxed. There are other tools and resources that can help you learn how to be mindful as well.
- **Get physical**. Your physical and mental health go hand in hand. This means improving your physical health can help improve your emotional well-being too. Go out for a walk or try some low-impact exercises and stretches. Check out this how-to guide for some easy exercises to help get you started or watch this video. Talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program to see what's right for you.
- **Stay connected**. Being social can also be helpful. There is a lot of technology today that you can use to connect with friends and family. You can do this without leaving home by using your phone, computer or tablet. Perhaps you can play an online game together or set up a phone call or video chat every Sunday night. Check out free services like "Zoom" and "Google Hangouts."

- **Get some fresh air**. A change of scenery and a little bit of sun can go a long way. Spend time outdoors. Visit a park, sit in your yard or enjoy a picnic. Be sure to follow the advice of your doctor and local health officials about staying safe while spending time outdoors.
- **Write in a journal**. Journaling has many benefits. Labeling your feelings and acknowledging them has a positive effect on your mood. All you need is a pen and paper! You can start by writing freely or by following guided prompts, which are available online. And if writing isn't your thing, there are also coloring books made for adults that can help increase mindfulness. You can find them online or in many craft shops and bookstores.
- **Start a new hobby**. Or rediscover a hobby that you haven't tried in a while. If you're interested in animals or nature, have you considered bird watching? Or maybe you've always wanted to learn to paint or improve your cooking skills. If it sparks your interest, go for it!
- **Speak with a professional**. It's normal for sad feelings to come and go. But if they linger, or if you're feeling a sense of sadness that impacts your treatment or daily life, it's perfectly acceptable to talk to a professional. Know it's OK to *not* be OK; seeing a counselor can help you work through your feelings in a healthy way. Many counselors now offer their services online. And if you are feeling depressed, you're not alone. About 1 in 4 people who have cancer experience depression.

We hope that these tips help lead you to having a more positive outlook.