Article Series Mental Health

Taking control of your stress

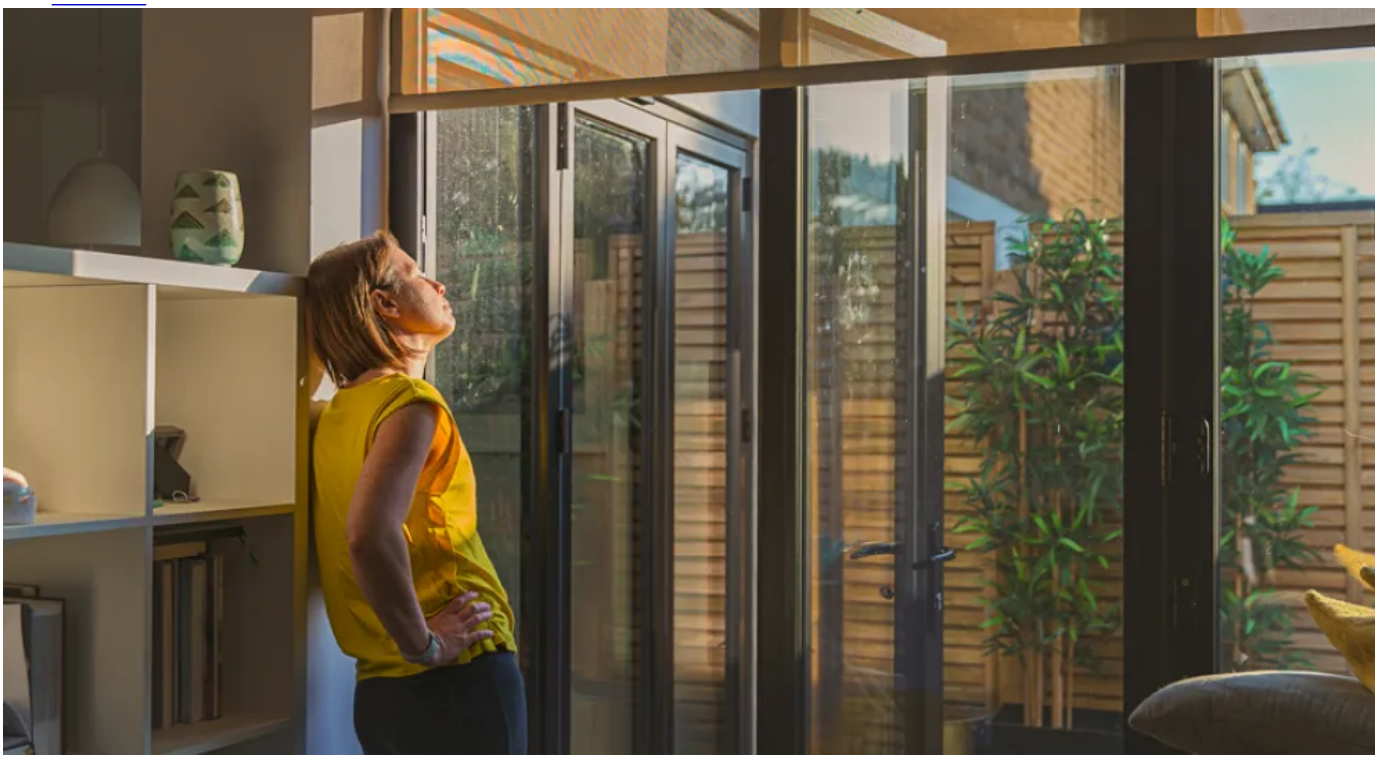
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Health-related fears. Financial burdens. Uncertainty about the future.

What do these have in common? They’re all challenges commonly faced by people with cancer — and they can also be sources of stress.

Of course, stress is a part of life. There’s no life, let alone cancer journey, without stress — which means finding ways to manage stress is an important part of a healthy life. If you’re living with cancer, stress management can be especially important. Because just like other key daily behaviors — such as your food choices,

physical activity and connection with others — how you manage stress may affect your daily quality of life and overall health in the longer term.

Managing stress can help limit the physical health consequences of stress. For example, research shows that chronic stress can weaken your immune system, trigger inflammation, and lessen your body’s overall ability to fight disease.

Then, there are ways stress can take a toll on mental health, leading to feelings of loneliness, anger, or loss of control.

Microsteps that may help manage stress

Microsteps are small, science-backed steps that can be taken to build new healthy habits.

Wherever you are on your cancer journey, you have an opportunity to manage stress more effectively. These **Microsteps** can help. As always, consult with your care team for the management practices that are best for you.

Spending a few minutes breathing deeply and slowly with your eyes closed.

Try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, the body's natural relaxation response.

Unfollowing any social media accounts that make you feel bad or trigger stress.

If you find yourself comparing yourself to others on social media and feeling stressed or negative as a result, try eliminating unnecessary sources of stress by being intentional about who and what shows up on your feed.

Taking a moment to reflect on one thing you’re grateful for.

Gratitude may help break the cycle of cumulative stress. Try thinking about a person you love, a bright spot in your life, or something you’re looking forward to. You can also try “habit-stacking” a moment of gratitude onto something you already do, like

washing your hands or brushing your teeth.

Saying a positive affirmation about your body.

For example, "I am more than my cancer." This affirmation can remind you that cancer is just one aspect of your life and doesn't have to define your entire identity.

Joining a cancer support group.

Connecting with others who are living with cancer may help you feel less alone and overwhelmed.

Rekindling a hobby or passion.

Reconnecting with a past hobby or passion can be a powerful counterbalance to the challenges of cancer, improving your quality of life and reminding you to make time for the things that bring you joy. Try starting with a small, achievable goal to slowly reintegrate your hobby into your life, whether it's painting, gardening, playing a musical instrument, or any other interest that ignites your passion.

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