Article Series Mental Health

Finding Strength, One Day at a Time

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When you’re living with cancer, a lot may feel out of your control. And if you feel stressed by all you need to manage — or just getting through each day — you’re not alone.

The fact is, some things are still within your control. And focusing on what you can control, including small daily choices, may help you feel stronger and more resilient. For example, you might be surprised to know that the way you talk to yourself may make a difference in how you handle tough days.

It may also help to talk with your care team about what you're going through and understand what support is available. Having these conversations may make treatment decisions and next steps feel more manageable.

Microsteps are small, science-backed actions that help build sustainable habits over time. Here are a few to consider trying. Some might work for you and some might not — that's OK. Even one new habit can make a difference. As always, talk to your care team about personal health advice that's right for you.

Picking a target bedtime and doing your best to stick to it, even on weekends.
You don't have to aim for perfection, just a little more consistency. Getting enough sleep can have positive effects on your immune system, your physical wellbeing, and your mindset.

Writing down one question for your care team before your next appointment.

Living with cancer often raises a lot of questions. Writing down questions before an appointment can help you get the information you need and make the most of your time with your care team. The *Preparing Your Thoughts Before Your Appointment* worksheet can also help you feel more ready.

Sending a short text check-in to a friend or family member.
Staying connected with loved ones can help you feel less alone. It doesn't have to be a deep conversation. A joke, a funny video, or a simple check-in counts.

Saying no to one thing today that feels like too much.
It's hard to say yes to everything when you're already managing so much. Cancel something, decline something, or drop a task that can wait. Your time and energy are limited resources. Saving them for what matters most can help you get through treatment and recovery.

Getting outside and taking a walk.
Even a short walk in the park, down the street, or around the yard can loosen stiff

muscles, lift your mood a little, and give you a break from being indoors If walking isn't an option today, sitting outside for a few minutes or doing some gentle stretching from a chair can offer some of the same benefits.

Breathing through a moment of stress.
Stress can build up fast, and sometimes your breath is the quickest way to interrupt it. Box breathing is a simple technique to help you slow down your breathing and steady yourself. Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, and pause for 4. Repeating this sequence a few times can help calm your body and ease your mind.

Challenging one unhelpful thought.

If you’re being hard on yourself, think about what you’d tell a friend in the same situation. For example, “I should be handling this better” could become, “This is a lot, and I’m doing what I can right now.”

You don’t have to change everything at once. Focusing on one small choice at a time can help you navigate treatment with a greater sense of control and confidence.