

Create Your Go-To Plan for High-Stress Moments

A simple guide to help you navigate difficult moments.

Living with cancer can include high-stress moments. For example, when preparing for an appointment or waiting for results after a scan. If you've felt this way, you're not alone.

You might not be able to make the stress go away entirely. But you can be prepared with simple strategies that help you through these difficult moments.

This guide can help you bring awareness to stressful moments and create a plan that works for you. Fill it out on a day that feels a little easier, and keep it nearby so when your stress rises, you don't have to figure everything out in the moment. You can also discuss your plan with a caregiver or loved one.

My Signs of Stress

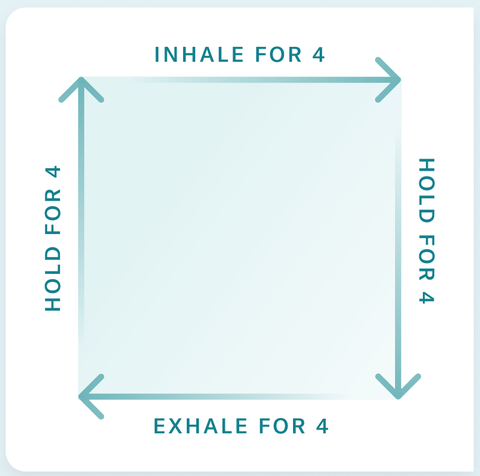
When my stress is high, I experience:

- ☐ Difficulty sleeping
- ☐ Pain or tension in my body
- ☐ Anxious thoughts
- ☐ Upset stomach
- ☐ Difficulty focusing
- ☐ Anger or grumpiness

☐ Other: . . . . . .

My Breathing Reset

In a difficult moment, conscious breathing or Box Breathing can help you calm your mind and reduce stress.



When I notice signs of stress, I will follow the below steps:

1. Pause
2. Breathe in through my nose for 4 counts
3. Hold for 4 counts
4. Breathe out slowly for 4 counts
5. Hold again for 4 counts
6. Repeat a few times

You can find more stress-reducing Thrive Resets here.

My Movement “Snack”

Movement “snacks” are short, easy movements that may help you shift your focus from your mind to your body.

When my stress is high and it’s safe for me to move, I will:

- ☐ Walk around the room or hallway
- ☐ Gently roll my shoulders and stretch my neck
- ☐ Stand up, sit down, and repeat a few times
- ☐ Do a light stretch
- ☐ Stretch my hands, feet, or fingers if a bigger movement isn't possible right now

☐ Other: . . . . . .

You can find more safe, easy movements here.

A Quick Journaling Check-In

Many people experiencing cancer-related stress find that tracking their feelings in a journal helps them process their feelings and reduce stress. Consider these prompts:

- “Right now, the hardest part is…”
- “If I put my fear into words, it would sound like…”
- “One small thing that helped me in the past was…”
- “One thing I want the answer to is…”
- “Even in this moment, something small I’m grateful for is…”
- “One thing I’d say to a friend in my situation is…”

People I Can Reach Out To

Connecting with someone you trust can help lower stress and help you feel more supported in a high-stress moment.

In a moment of stress, I can contact these **3 people**:

Name	How I reach them	Notes e.g., “good for late-night texts”
1		
2		
3		

My Stress-Reducing Affirmation

Positive affirmations are short, encouraging statements you can repeat to yourself during an overwhelming moment. They can help you manage stress and feel more in control. Try one of these affirmations or create your own.

When my mind is racing, I will remind myself:

- ☐ “I don’t have to solve everything today.”
- ☐ “I can take this one step at a time.”
- ☐ “This moment is difficult, and I can get through it.”
- ☐ “It’s OK to feel what I’m feeling.”
- ☐ My own phrase: . . . . . .

Microsteps to Support You

Here are some Microsteps — small, science-backed steps — for high-stress moments. As always, talk to your care team about personal health advice that’s right for you.

If you feel stressed about an upcoming appointment, writing down one question you want to ask your care team.

It's common to forget questions when you’re feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Writing down even one question ahead of time can help you feel more prepared and ensure your most important concern is addressed. You can also use the *Preparing Your Thoughts Before Your Appointment* worksheet to help you feel more ready.

If you feel anxious about a scan or treatment session, asking a friend or family member to accompany you.

It's natural to feel anxious heading into a scan or treatment session, especially when you're not sure what to expect. Knowing that someone who cares about you will be there can be comforting and help you stay calm. They can also help you remember any important information you’re given on the day.

If you're waiting for test results, scheduling one small enjoyable activity for that day.

Uncertainty can make it difficult to focus on anything else. Planning something you enjoy — such as having coffee with a friend, watching a favorite show, taking a walk, or spending time with a pet — can give you something positive to look forward to and may help you reduce the stress of waiting.

If you’re feeling stressed, taking a few slow breaths before moving on to your next task.

Stress can build up in your body before you even notice it in your mind. Slow, deep breathing can help calm some of the tension in your body and help reduce stress.



Your plan doesn't have to be perfect – it just has to be yours.

Keep it somewhere easy to find and remember: you don’t have to figure everything out in the moment.