Coping with Cancer: Managing the emotional side of a cancer diagnosis

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My background

- Clinical Assistant Professor at University of Denver
- Fellowship-trained Clinical Health Psychologist at Colorado Blood Cancer Institute
- PhD in Counseling Psychology from University of Maryland
- Research and clinical interests in oncology
Overview

- Addressing emotions related to cancer
- Stages of emotions
- Social support
- Advocating for yourself
- Resources
Exercise

- Write down one word about how you are feeling right now
- Write down one word about a situation that is on your mind
Normal Emotions

- Anything you are feeling is normal!

- Possibilities:
  - Depressed
  - Angry
  - Scared
  - Denial
  - Relief
  - Hopeful
  - Shocked
  - Lonely
  - Sadness
  - Fear
  - Guilt
  - Anxious
Relaxation exercises

- Breathing Exercises
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Guided Imagery
- Meditation/Mindfulness
How do the pieces fit together?
The cancer journey

- Diagnosis
- Waiting
- Treatment
- Grief
- Fear of Recurrence
- Survivorship
- What comes next?
Difficult situations

- Telling family and friends
- Fear of the unknown
- Getting advice and suggestions
- Fear of recurrence
- Waiting!
- Going back for tests, scans, visits
- Making healthcare decisions
- Others
Suggestions

- Get organized
- Be your own advocate
- Bring a loved one to appointments
- Consider getting a second opinion
- Get support
**Depression**

- If painful emotions:
  - Last for 2 weeks or longer
  - Are impacting your life and ability to do things that are important to you
  - Then talk to your healthcare team or a specialist or therapist about treatment

- Treatment:
  - Individual or Group Psychotherapy
  - Medication
  - Relaxation and Stress Management Skills
  - Communication Skills
  - Exercise and Diet
Coping

- Active vs. Passive (avoidance) coping
- Positive coping strategies
- Negative coping strategies
Strategies

- Build a good foundation
  - Sleeping
  - Eating
  - Social Support

- Find things you enjoy doing
  - Even small breaks help
  - Learn to say no to things you don’t

- Ask for… and accept help!
Ideas that have helped others

- Journaling
- Creative expression
- Acupuncture/massage/healing touch
- Spirituality
- Getting support
- Gentle exercise
- Benefit finding and positive growth
Relationships with others

- Remember that others are affected too
- Open communication
- How to talk to loved ones
- Relationships take work
- Role differences
**Resources**

- **American Cancer Society**
  - (800) ACS-2345
  - [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

- **Leukemia and Lymphoma Society**
  - [http://www.lls.org/](http://www.lls.org/)

- **Cancer Care**
  - (800) 813-HOPE
  - [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

- **Cancer Survivors Project**
  - [www.cancersurvivorsproject.org](http://www.cancersurvivorsproject.org)
  - **Cancer and Careers**
    - [www.cancerandcareers.org](http://www.cancerandcareers.org)

- **Cancer Hope**
  - 877-HOPENET
  - [www.cancerhopenetwork.org](http://www.cancerhopenetwork.org)

- **Cancer Survival Toolbox**
  - Available at 877-TOOLS-4-U
  - [http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox/](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox/)

- **A Cancer Survivor's Almanac, Charting Your Journey, Hoffman, B, ed. (Wiley 2004)**
  - [www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)
  - 888-650-9127

  - **LIVESTRONG**
    - (866) 673-7205
    - [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

- **National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)**
  - (877) 622-7937
  - [www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)
Counseling Resources

- Check with your cancer center
- Meet with a psychologist, social worker, or counselor
- Professional Psychology Clinic at University of Denver (303) 871-3626
- Contact me if you have questions:
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