

Studies show that about half of all cancer patients say they feel some sort of anxiety and about one-fourth report feeling a great deal of anxiety. Nervousness and fear is a common reaction to a stressful life event like cancer. Generally, we can manage feeling nervous before a doctor's appointment or waiting for test results. However, the fears associated with worrying about a medical procedure or financial pressures associated with treatment can stop us from going about our everyday activities.

If you are concerned that you find you are nervous and afraid to the point that it is affecting your ability to enjoy your life, talk to your doctor, nurse or social worker for help.

What Symptoms May Indicate that I May Need Help with Feeling Nervous or Afraid\*:

Feeling worried all the time.

Not being able to focus.

Not being able to "turn off thoughts" most of the time.

Trouble sleeping most nights.

Frequent crying spells.

Feeling afraid most of the time.

Having symptoms such as fast heartbeat, dry mouth, shaky hands, restlessness, or feeling on edge.

Anxiety that is not relieved by the usual ways to lessen anxiety such as distraction by staying busy.

What Can You Do to Manage Fear and Nervousness?

It's normal to feel nervous and afraid in the face of a stressful experience like cancer. Allow yourself to experience these feelings without feeling like you are out of control. This is a normal part of the emotional healing through a difficult experience.

Talk with your family, friends, doctor, nurse, and/or oncology social worker about what you are feeling.

Find ways to relax such as meditation, yoga or breathing exercises.

Join a support group to hear how other people are managing feelings of fear and nervousness.

Seek professional help from a therapist such as a social worker experienced in working with cancer patients. Talk therapy is often the best way to manage extreme fear or anxiety.

Talk with your physician or therapist about medication that can ease anxiety.

Use humor — find something to laugh about every day.

Consider spiritual outlets. For some people, meditation or prayer is a useful tool in managing the roller coaster of emotions.

Keep a journal to record and release your feelings.