

# Feeling Nervous or Afraid

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. And oftentimes, the fears associated with worrying about a medical procedure or financial pressures associated with treatment nag at us but do not 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. Some fear and anxiety are a normal reaction to being under stress and facing a serious illness. Chances are this is a short-term problem that will resolve itself as you begin to feel better. However, extreme or prolonged nervousness and fear can lead to a more serious anxiety disorder that can affect your ability to participate actively in your treatment and have a healthy outcome.

## **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, 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 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 prayer. For many people, prayer is a useful tool in managing the roller coaster of emotions.
- Keep a journal to record and release your feelings.

\*From the National Cancer Institute, Adjustment to Cancer, Anxiety and Distress PDQ, 2014