

Worry about the Future

It is common for people facing a serious illness to worry about the future and what lies ahead. A diagnosis of cancer brings many changes. Many of these changes are physical and/or emotional. For some people diagnosed with cancer these changes will be more spiritual or make them think more about the meaning of their lives and what really matters to them.

People touched by cancer often talk about experiencing three feelings: loss of control, unwanted aloneness and loss of hope. All of these feelings can lead us to worry about the future and an uncertainty about what may lie ahead. This is a normal reaction to the roller coaster of the cancer experience that only becomes a problem if you are so overcome with worry that you are unable to enjoy things that usually bring you pleasure.

If you find that you are extremely anxious about the future, reach out to a trusted friend, clergy person, or mental health professional. Talk to your oncologist, oncology nurse or oncology social worker about your concerns. Some fears and concerns may be unfounded and can be cleared up through a better understanding of your cancer and its treatment. There are also medications that your oncologist can prescribe that may be helpful to reduce the stress and anxiety you are feeling.

Above all, know that it is okay and even a good idea to make plans for the future. Keep moving ahead one step at a time. It is okay to feel overwhelmed at times by your worries about the future. Remember that even before you were diagnosed with cancer, you might have had the same kinds of worries about your future.

A diagnosis of cancer can make some people feel out of control of their body and their life. Having questions about the meaning of one's life is also normal. Spending some time thinking about this topic may help you to discover new goals, priorities and possibilities. People with cancer often find that this chance to focus on what really matters can change the quality of their lives in very positive ways. The time following a cancer diagnosis can be a time to reconnect with the many different ways your life matters to you and to make the changes that are important to you.

A promise to yourself to spend more time with family and friends is a common way that people decide to make changes in their lives. For others it can be a chance to complete a project such as finishing a scrapbook or making a video. Still others decide to act on something they have always wanted to do such as take up a new hobby or travel. There is no right answer that will fit all people. For each person, the changes made or even the decision not to make any changes will be a personal one.