

Chapter 10. Coping

With contributions from Amy Beazizo, R.N., BSN, OCN, Clinical Manager/Breast Health Nurse, Sutter Roseville Medical Center; and Nancy L. Brown, Ph.D., Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute.

While your focus will be on your physical health and all your tests and treatments, it is important not to forget about your emotional, psychological and spiritual health. They can affect your physical health and play an important part in your recovery.

This is a tough period in life, no doubt about it. Whether you are coping with the diagnosis of prostate cancer, making a treatment decision, undergoing treatment, or recovering and learning to deal with the side effects of the treatment, you are going to need some support.

People need different kinds of support, and get it in different ways, but in general, most people need to:

- Know that their family and friends are available to help;
- Find a way to balance the focus on health with work load and schedule;
- Find a way to reduce stress and handle any fear, anxiety or depression; and
- Attend a support group to see if the support provided is right for them.

Prostate cancer patients may also need other people to:

- Avoid saying things like “well at least prostate cancer is not serious”;
- Acknowledge how fragile and vulnerable you may feel;
- Support you (hold your hand); and
- Let you be emotional, tearful, fragile and scared when you feel those things.

Emotional Support

Prepare a phone list of “helpers.” It can include family, friends and neighbors or volunteers from the American Cancer Society’s *Reach to Recovery* program (call 1-800-ACS-2345).

Try to find someone to whom you can reach out and open up. It should be someone you feel safe sharing your thoughts, fears, anger and hopes. Support groups also offer a safe place to share your thoughts and emotions. Be sure to consult with your health care provider for local groups in your area, or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800- ACS-2345.

Find inspiration and hope in the things that bring you joy (such as reading, music, family, etc.).

Have family members or friends help you get your house ready before you have surgery or chemotherapy. There are a lot of small adjustments that can make your life easier, such as:

- Having a small step stool available to eliminate the need to reach high.
- Using a hand-held shower hose when bathing.
- Stocking up on supplies that you may need (thermometer, toiletries, food to settle your stomach, etc).

Family and Partner/Spouse Issues

Every person has a different way of handling news that a loved one has cancer. Many people

react with shock, disbelief and even anger when they first receive the news. Keep in mind that there is no “right way” for you or your family to feel about your diagnosis. Sharing and being open with one another is one of the best ways for families to deal with their feelings.

Should I Tell My Children I Have Cancer?

Many parents don't want to burden their children with worries and fears about their illness. They keep the truth from their children in hopes of sparing them some pain. But even the youngest of children can sense when something is wrong. Many parents choose to tell their children only what they feel their children really need to know. How much you tell depends upon a child's age and maturity and how much you feel your children can handle. Be prepared to offer your children a lot of reassurance.

How Can My Family Members Help Me?

Asking your family members for help during this time benefits you and them. Assign specific tasks to each family member. Don't hesitate to ask for help with everyday tasks like cooking, cleaning, yard work and driving children to their activities. You might ask several people to provide different kinds of emotional support so that you always have someone to call on.

What Legal Issues Do I Need to Discuss with My Family?

When you've been diagnosed with cancer, you want to concentrate on getting better and coping with your treatment. It's also a good idea to make some important decisions with your family and doctor while you are still feeling well. Things you may want to discuss include:

- **An Advance Health Care Directive:** This document contains written instructions specifying the type of future medical treatment to be used in the event you become unable to speak for yourself.
- **A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care:** This legal document authorizes another person to make health-care decisions for you if you became physically or mentally unable to make these decisions yourself.

Suggestions for Strengthening Hope for You and Your Loved Ones

1. Maintain a healthy balance between optimism and reality.
2. Find support in prayer and/or religious faith or philosophy of life.
3. Share a sense of hope with one another.
4. Develop trust in the skills of your doctor and other health care team members.
5. Learn from the stories of other cancer survivors.

Both you and your loved ones are encouraged to participate in support groups. Find creative ways to bring pleasure to each day. Appreciate the beauty and wonder present in life each day.

Should I Join a Support Group?

People diagnosed with cancer and their families face many challenges that may leave them feeling overwhelmed, afraid and alone. It can be difficult to cope with these challenges or to talk to even the most supportive family members and friends. If this is the case, you and your family may want to join a cancer support group. Cancer support groups can help you and your loved ones:

- Feel less alone;
- Improve your ability to deal with the uncertainties and challenges that cancer brings;

- Meet others experiencing the same problems and fears and discuss ways to cope; and
- Find a confidential atmosphere where you can discuss the challenges of your illness or of having a loved one with cancer without feeling judged.

Sometimes, others who have been through similar experiences can explain things differently than your health care providers. Be aware, however, that others may share information or experiences that do not apply to you. Never replace your doctor's advice with that given by another patient. Check with your doctor, local health care facilities or the American Cancer Society (1-800-ACS-2345) for a listing of support groups in your area.

Fear and Anxiety

Many men with prostate cancer suffer from prolonged anxiety and depression, which are natural responses to the fear of the disease. The fear of cancer reoccurring is also a natural and very powerful response. After a cancer experience, your sense of self is altered forever. You know that you are not protected from losing your health. You may feel fearful, anxious or uneasy for a long time after your last treatment. It is important to deal with these feelings so that cancer doesn't rob you of living your life to the fullest.

Here are a few helpful tips:

1. Talk about your fears and other feelings with someone you trust.
2. Take control of your life. Be aware of the cancer, but don't let it dictate the way you live.
3. Redirect your anxiety into energy for taking action.
4. Become knowledgeable about your cancer. Knowledge is power.
5. Remember to have regular check-ups.
6. Understand that there will be days when you will have fearful thoughts. But also know that there will be days when you don't.
7. Focus on the here and now. Enjoy each day and remember that life is a precious gift.

Depression

It is common for prostate cancer patients to experience some form of depression during their diagnosis and treatment. This is called situational depression. If you feel you are becoming depressed, please tell your doctor, nurse or therapist. They are there to help you and can offer suggestions to get you through this difficult period.

Sexuality

The issue of sexuality is sensitive for many men. It can be a painful subject when you are newly diagnosed, undergoing treatment or simply trying to get on with your life. The changes to your body and your sexual drive are some of the most difficult issues to talk about to your partner, friends, or even your doctor or therapist. Sexual thoughts and feelings are an important part of everyday life. It affects our zest for living, our self-image and our relationships with others. Letting your partner know what you are feeling can help you reconnect and find new ways to satisfy your needs for love and intimacy. It may also be helpful to go for short-term counseling as a couple or by yourself.

For more information on cancer and sexuality, you can find lots of help online through the American Cancer Society's (ACS) Web site at <http://www.cancer.org> (type "sexuality" in the search box) or by calling 1-800-ACS-2345 for the ACS brochure, *Sexuality for Men and Their*

Partners. The information in this section is not meant to replace the individual attention, advice, and treatment plan of your oncologist and medical team.

Thinking About What You Need

As you recover from the trauma of diagnosis and treatment, sexual feelings and how you express them will regain importance. Remember to be patient and give yourself time. It's normal to feel uncomfortable and anxious. Confidence and comfort should return in time.

Consider ways to increase your comfort level in your first post-treatment sexual experience, such as:

- Planning sex when you are feeling stronger and energized; this may be earlier in the day or at times between treatments;
- Having some quiet time first with your partner that includes affection to get used to each other again; and
- Take the pressure off by expressing your sexuality using other means (such as oral sex, massage, kissing and fondling) without it having to lead to intercourse or orgasm.

Exercise can be very helpful. It can lift your mood by releasing endorphins, and shapes and tones your muscles, which can add to your confidence .

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Despite exhaustion and fatigue from treatment and stress, between 30 and 50 percent of cancer patients report problems falling asleep. It may be helpful to keep a record of your sleeping patterns for two weeks including: 1) When do you go to bed? 2) Do you fall asleep immediately? 3) When do you wake up? 4) Are hot flashes waking you up at night? 5) Is pain interfering with your ability to sleep?

Share this record with your doctor and come up with a "sleep plan." This may include medication and lifestyle changes. The National Cancer Institute recommends that you create an environment that decreases sleep interruptions by:

- Lowering noise;
- Dimming or turning off lights;
- Adjusting room temperature;
- Placing pillows in a supportive position; and
- Wearing loose, soft clothing to bed.

In addition, other helpful things may include:

- Eat a high protein snack two hours before bedtime;
- If you can't fall asleep or stay asleep, leave your bedroom and engage in a quiet activity in another room;
- Don't let yourself fall asleep outside the bedroom, and return to bed when you are sleepy;
- Maintain a regular wake-up time;
- Distract your mind by reading, watching a video, or listening to books on tape;
- Avoid caffeine within four to six hours of bedtime;
- Avoid the use of nicotine close to bedtime;
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages within four to six hours of bedtime; and

- Avoid strenuous exercise within six hours of bedtime.

Do I Need Medication?

There are many situations throughout your recovery process where medication may be warranted. Any symptom that is interfering with your quality of life should be discussed with your doctor or health care provider. These may include:

- Anxiety
- Bone loss
- Constipation
- Depression
- Hot flashes
- Insomnia
- Nausea/vomiting
- Pain

You are your best advocate, so don't be afraid to speak up and talk with your doctor.