

# Caring for Mind, Body, and Spirit: Approaches to Coping with Cancer Care

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# Agenda

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- Understanding Distress and Cancer
  - Sources of Distress*
  - Manifestations of Distress*
- Approaches to Coping

# Sources of Distress in Cancer

- Physical pain, fatigue, or other symptoms
- Grief and loss
- Uncertainty, fear, and worry about the future
- Disruption of important relationships
- Disruption of important and meaningful life activities
  - Work*
  - Recreation*
- Feelings of social isolation
- Changes in body image and/or identity
- Spiritual and/or existential pain
  - Loss of control, stability, or predictability*
- Financial stress



# How we might experience distress

## Physically

- Pain
- Fatigue
- Sleeplessness

## Emotionally

- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Anger

## Spiritually

- Loss of direction or purpose
- Yearning to “control”

## Cognitively

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
  - “Brain fog”

## Interpersonally

- Withdrawal or isolation
  - Conflict
- Dependency

## Behaviorally

- Avoidance or disengagement
- Diminished self-care



# Maintaining focus on what you have control over

When we think we have no control, we often feel helpless, defeated, and even hopeless

One skill to help manage distress is to identify the aspects of the situation which may be within our control

Identifying even one small thing we can impact pulls us out of helplessness and into action

”You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”

*-Jon Kabat-Zinn*



# Where is my battery?

What is  
**depleting** me,  
physically and  
psychologically?



What is  
**re-charging** or  
**replenishing** me,  
physically and  
psychologically?

# Seek Support

## **Instrumental**

(household chores, errands,  
practical tasks)

## **Emotional**

(listening, showing affection)

## **Informational**

(Providing advice and  
information)

## **Existential/Spiritual**

(People, spaces, or activities  
that provide a sense of meaning  
and belonging)

# Seek Restful and Restorative Sleep

- Remain in good communication with your medical team about:
  - Prescribed medications and how they affect your sleep and energy*
  - Proper management of cancer and treatment-related side effects*
- Maintain good sleep hygiene
  - Establish a bedtime routine and ritual*
  - Consistent sleep and wake times*
  - Optimize your sleep environment*
  - Embrace your inner child*
- Reserve your bed and bedroom for sleep
- Embrace movement during the day (also important for managing fatigue!)
- Be mindful of daytime napping
- Be strategic with your worry time
  - Gently challenge thoughts that may be bringing you further away from sleep*
- Experiment with relaxation
  - Diaphragmatic breathing*
  - Visualization*
  - Progressive muscle relaxation*

# Mindfulness and Leading a Life Aligned with Your Personal Values



# Mindfulness

*"Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."*

Source: *Wherever You Go There You are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

# Mindfulness

- **How often am I mindful, still, and present, as opposed to distracted, or automatic, in my everyday actions?**

*Consider mindfulness to be like a muscle to be exercised*

- **What would happen if I paused, for just a moment?**

- **What would happen if I were to be the witness to, or observer of my experiences?**

*Just watching this moment, without trying to change it*

# Mindfulness Steps

- **Reserve judgment**

*Observe without evaluation*

*Be an observer of experience—“Just the facts”*

*Focus on the “what,” not the “good” or “bad,” the “terrible” or “wonderful,” the “should” or “should not.”*

*“When you find yourself judging, DON’T JUDGE YOUR JUDGING”*

- **Practice acceptance of each moment**

*“A blanket spread out on the lawn accepts both the rain and the sun, each leaf that falls upon it.”*

- **Do one thing at a time, with all of your attention**

*If your mind wanders to other thoughts or feelings, acknowledge this, and gently guide it back to the one thing (a thought, feeling, or behavior) you wish to attend to—as many times as you need to.*

# Opportunities for Practical Practice of Mindfulness



# Mindfulness of What We Do

- Practice mindful breathing
- Take a mindful walk
- Have a mindful bite, or meal
- Try a mindful body scan
- Do a daily chore or task mindfully





# Mindfulness of Our Thoughts

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Afraid



Confused



Surprised



Sad



Excited



Disgusted



Proud



Angry



Sick



Happy



Very Happy



Hungry



Lost



Shy



Sleepy



Embarrassed



Unhappy



Very Sad



Tired



Worried

# Mindfulness of How We Feel

**Today me will live in the moment,  
unless it's unpleasant,  
in which case me will eat a cookie.**

- Cookie Monster



Source: <http://mindfulbalance.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/cookie-monster.jpg>



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# Gratitude and Grief

*Image source:*

*<http://adellebrewer.com/2015/10/balance-what-not-to-love/>*

# Honing psychological flexibility

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“The ability to be in the present moment with full awareness and openness to our experience, and to take action guided by our values” (Harris, 2009)



# Values

- Activities that we care about and give our lives meaning
  - They allow us to make personal choices based upon directions in which we would like our lives to go
- They can be dynamic, and shaped over time by our experiences
- They are very subjective
  - What may be important to one person may not necessarily be as important to someone else
- We choose our values freely
- When we connect with our values, we are able move our lives in meaningful directions, even in the face of difficult or painful experiences

# Are values the same as goals?

- Think of values as a compass that serves to give us direction in our lives
- Goals can be achieved or accomplished, while values can not
- Embracing values is something that you do, not something you “have” or complete
- Values are directions, not outcomes
- Goals can be derived from our values





# Translating values into personal goals

How might you want to manifest the values that you find most important in your day-to-day life?

# Resources for Additional Support

- **UCSF Psycho-Oncology**

415-353-7019

<https://cancer.ucsf.edu/support/psycho-oncology/psycho-oncology>

- **UCSF Survivorship Wellness Group Program**

415-353-3931

<https://cancer.ucsf.edu/support/survivorship-wellness>



# Thank you

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