



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Anxiety During Your Cancer Treatment

This information explains what anxiety is and how to manage it during your cancer treatment.

About Anxiety

Anxiety is a strong feeling of worry or fear. It's a common and normal reaction to cancer and cancer treatment. How anxious you feel may be different at different times during your treatment. You may feel anxious before starting a new treatment or while you're waiting for test results. You may also feel anxious after finishing treatment if you're worried that the cancer might come back.

Feelings of anxiety can range from mild uneasiness to overwhelming panic. Anxiety can make it harder for you to manage your cancer treatment. It can also affect your daily life and relationships. This is why it's important to be aware of the signs of anxiety and learn what you can do to help manage them.

Signs of anxiety

Anxiety can cause physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, or both. The following things can be signs of anxiety:

- Nervousness
- Fatigue (feeling more tired and weak than usual)
- Uncontrollable worrying
- A faster heart rate than usual
- Headaches

- Trouble sleeping
- Trembling or shaking
- Sweating
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
- Chest pain
- Muscle tension
- Dry mouth
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Shortness of breath
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering

If you have any of these signs, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section for help.

How to Manage Your Anxiety

The first step in managing your anxiety is to talk about how you feel. Your healthcare provider and social worker can reassure, support, and guide you. It's always a good idea to let your healthcare team know how you, your family, and your friends are feeling emotionally. There are many resources available to you and your family.

Here are some ways you can manage your anxiety during your cancer treatment.

- **Do some light physical activity.** Light physical activity can be going for a walk or a short bike ride. Physical activity can help improve your mood and relieve stress. Talk with your healthcare provider before starting new exercises.
 - Exercise with Memorial Sloan Kettering's (MSK) clinical fitness specialists in Integrative Medicine's video series by visiting www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLME9VJQhE-huAv4Haot7pMkG2-tnOulFi. Videos include aerobics,

strength training, core work, and gentle stretches.

- Try tai chi with videos featuring MSK’s martial arts instructor by visiting www.mskcc.org/taichi. Tai chi is a gentle form of exercise that can be done at home to increase balance, steady breathing, and reduce anxiety.
- **Stay connected to your family and friends.** While you may not be able to be with your loved ones in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, you can call, text, and video chat with them. You may find it helpful to plan daily calls with your loved ones that you can look forward to. You can also try video chatting with your family during meals or to play games together. It’s important to create a support system for yourself during your cancer treatment. Anxiety can make this hard to do but staying connected to people who can support and talk with you about your experience can help ease your worries. For more information, read *Managing Stress and Anxiety Caused by COVID-19* (https://mskdirect.mskcc.org/pe/stress_anxiety_covid).
- **Get emotional support.** MSK has many professionals, volunteers, and support programs that can help you cope with your anxiety. You can contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section below for help.
- **Join a group.** You may also find it comforting to speak with other people going through cancer treatment in one of our support groups. For more information, call our Counseling Center at 646-888-0200 or visit www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling.
 - We also offer online support groups through our Virtual Programs. Visit www.mskcc.org/vp for more information.
- **Learn relaxation techniques.** Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, and acupressure (putting pressure on parts of your body to help you relax) can help you manage your anxiety. Ask your healthcare provider for more information on relaxation techniques.
 - Listen to and follow along with the Integrative Medicine Service’s free meditations on www.mskcc.org/meditation.
 - Try music therapy with the Integrative Medicine Service. You can listen to or perform music during your hospital stay while trained therapists guide

you. You can also listen to music on your own to help reduce stress and anxiety. For more information about music therapy, call the service at 646-888-0800 or visit www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/activities/music-therapy.

- You can also try acupressure to help relieve anxiety. To learn how to do acupressure on yourself, read our resource *Acupressure for Stress and Anxiety* (https://mskdirect.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_anxiety). Depending on your treatment, you may bruise easily so talk to your healthcare provider before trying acupressure.
- For more information about integrative medicine therapies that can help with anxiety during your cancer treatment, read our resource *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* (https://mskdirect.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies).
- **Medication.** If your anxiety is getting in the way of your daily activities, medication may be helpful. Different types of medications are available to treat anxiety. For more information, talk with your healthcare provider or call 646-888-0200 to make an appointment with the Counseling Center.

If anxiety is affecting your life in any way, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also contact any of the resources below for help. We can help you find the right treatment for you.

Resources at MSK

Social Work

212-639-7020

www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/social-work-support

Our social workers provide emotional support and guidance to patients and their families, friends, and caregivers. Social work offers programs, including both in-person and online support groups. They can also help with practical issues such as transportation to and from medical appointments, temporary housing, and financial concerns. Social workers are available at every MSK location. To talk with a social worker, ask your healthcare provider or call 212-639-7020.

If you're interested in joining an online support group, visit the Virtual Programs website at www.mskcc.org/vp for more information and to sign up.

Counseling Center

646-888-0200

www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling

Many people find that counseling helps them manage their emotions during cancer treatment. MSK's counselors provide counseling for individuals, couples, families, caregivers, and groups. They can also prescribe medications to help with anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or call 646-888-0200.

Location

MSK's Counseling Center

641 Lexington Avenue (on 54th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues)

7th floor

New York, NY 10022

Spiritual Care

212-639-5982

www.mskcc.org/spiritual-religious-care

At MSK, chaplains are available to listen, help support family members, pray, contact nearby clergy or faith groups, or simply to be a comforting companion and spiritual presence. Anyone can meet with a chaplain, regardless of what religion you follow.

MSK also has an interfaith chapel that's open to everyone. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or call 212-639-5982.

Hours

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Interfaith Chapel Location

Memorial Hospital (near the main lobby)

1275 York Avenue between 67th and 68th Streets

New York, NY 10065

Patient and Caregiver Support Program

212-639-5007

www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/support-groups-programs/patient-patient-support

You may find it comforting to speak with someone who has been through a similar treatment. Through the Patient and Caregiver Support Program, you can speak with former patients and caregivers. They can speak with you in person, over the phone, or through email. For more information, call 212-639-5007 or email patient2patient@mskcc.org.

Integrative Medicine Program

646-888-0800

www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many therapies to complement (go along with) traditional medical care. Some of the services offered include music therapy, mind and body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Services are available to patients, their families and caregivers, and to the general public. For more information, or to make an appointment, call 646-888-0800.

Hours

Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM

Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Location

Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center

1429 First Avenue at East 74th Street

New York, NY 10021

Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC)

646-888-8106

www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors

At MSK, care doesn't end when your treatment is finished. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment. This program has

many services, including seminars, workshops, support groups, counseling on life after treatment, and help with insurance and employment issues. For more information, call 646-888-8106.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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