Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Scanxiety During Your Cancer Treatment

This information explains what scanxiety (skan-ZY-eh-tee) is. It also explains how to manage scanxiety during your cancer treatment. In this resource, the words “you” and “your” refer to you or your child.

About scanxiety

As part of your cancer treatment, your care team may order imaging scans to check how your treatment is going. These scans help them decide if they need to make any changes to your treatment plan. But they can also make you feel anxious (worried or afraid). Anxiety caused by imaging scans is called scanxiety.

Scanxiety is a common response to having scans. Everyone has different amounts of scanxiety. Some people feel mild (slight) worry, while others feel strong panic or distress.

Everyone has scanxiety at different times too. You might feel scanxiety before a scan, during a scan, while waiting for results, or at all 3 times.

Before scans

If you have scanxiety before a scan, you might start to worry as soon as it’s scheduled. You may feel stressed in the days leading up to your scan.

On the day of your scan, you may feel nervous getting ready for your appointment. You may also feel nervous on your way to your scan or in the waiting room.

During scans

If you have scanxiety during a scan, you may feel uncomfortable inside the scanner. The space inside some scanners can be small and cramped. You might feel panicked or like you're trapped. You may also be scared of the loud noises the scanner makes.

Some scanner tables are hard and do not have a cushion. They may feel uncomfortable to lie on. You might also find it hard to lie still in one position for a long time.

After scans

After a scan, it's normal to have scanxiety while waiting for your results. You may feel nervous or scared. You might have the same worrying thoughts over and over. The waiting can be stressful if your results take longer than normal. It may also bring up painful memories of bad scan results.

Signs of scanxiety

It can be hard to manage scanxiety during cancer treatment. Scanxiety can get in the way of your daily activities and affect your quality of life. That's why it's helpful to know the signs of scanxiety and learn how to manage them.

Scanxiety can affect your mind, body, feelings, or all 3. The following can be signs of scanxiety:

- Trouble sleeping.
- Not feeling hungry.
- Having a faster heart rate than usual, higher blood pressure than usual, or both.
- Mood swings (changes in your mood).
- Having sad or worrying thoughts over and over.
- Trouble focusing.
- Showing less interest in the hobbies and activities you used to enjoy.

- Fear of your cancer spreading or coming back.

If you have any of these signs, talk with your healthcare provider. Tell them if these signs are getting in the way of your daily activities and quality of life. You can also contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section for help. We can help you find the right treatment for you.

How to manage scanxiety

The first step in managing your scanxiety is to talk about how you feel. Your family and friends may also have scanxiety. Talking with them may be comforting for both you and them. Your care team at MSK can also comfort, support, and guide you. It’s always good to tell them how you and your loved ones are feeling.

There are lots of things you can do before, during, and after your scan to manage your scanxiety. Try these coping methods to find what works for you. There’s no right or wrong way to handle your scanxiety.

Before your scan

Schedule your scan for early in the morning, if you can

You may not need to wait as long if you have your scan earlier in the day. That means you will have less time to feel scanxiety.

Write down a list of questions to ask your care team

Here are some questions you can ask:

- What should I do to get ready for the scan?
- What will happen during the scan?
- How long will the scan take?
- When will I get my results?
- Who can I call if I’m waiting a long time for my results?
- How will I get my results?
- If the scan shows my treatment is not working, what are the next steps?

If your child is having a scan, write down any questions they have for their care team.

Make sure to write down the answers so you can go over them later. You can print this resource and use the space at the end to write down questions and answers.

You can also ask your care team for more information on how to get ready for your scan. This can be something you can read, such as a handout.

Talk with your care team about your concerns

Make an appointment to talk with your care team 1 to 2 weeks before your scan. If you cannot see them in person, schedule a phone call. If you have a list of questions, have it with you during the appointment.

Tell your care team about your concerns. If you're worried about your scan, they can help you plan ways to be more comfortable and relaxed. If you're nervous about being inside the scanner, they may prescribe a medication to help you feel more relaxed.

If your child is having a scan, think about what things may scare them or cause them stress. Talk with your child's care team about your concerns. They can help you plan ways for your child to be more comfortable and relaxed during their scan.

Depending on the scan you're having, you may be lying in one position for 30 to 60 minutes. Tell your care team ahead of time if you think you will be uncomfortable lying still. They may recommend or prescribe a pain medication you can take before your scan.

Take notes to help you remember what you and your care team talked about.

Confirm when and how you will get your scan results

If you're anxious about waiting for your results, tell your care team. Make a plan with them about when and how you will get your results. Most people can get their results 1 business day (Monday through Friday) after their scan. You can

get your results through MSK MyChart (MSK's patient portal), by phone, or in person.

If you have an MSK MyChart account, you will be able to see your results as soon as they're available. You may see them before your care team does. While some results are easy to understand, others may be confusing or worrying. You can choose to look at your results, but we recommend waiting until your care team calls you. They usually call within 24 hours (1 day) of your scan. They can explain what your results mean.

If you don't have an MSK MyChart account, you can choose to get your results:

- By phone. If you choose this, it may take a few days for your care team to call you with your results. To shorten your wait time, try calling your care team soon after your scan to get your results. If your results aren't ready, they can give you more information about when you can expect your results.
- In person. If you choose this, you will likely have to wait until your follow-up appointment to get your results. To shorten your wait time, try scheduling your follow-up appointment for as soon as possible after your scan.

If you don't have an MSK MyChart account, visit mskmychart.mskcc.org or call 646-227-2593 to sign up.

Stay in touch with family and friends

Talk with your loved ones about the scan you're going to have. Tell them how you feel about it. It's important to make a support system for yourself during your cancer treatment. Sharing your feelings with people who support you can help ease your mind and lessen your scanxiety.

Get mental and emotional support

MSK has mental health experts, such as counselors and social workers, who can help you with your scanxiety. We also have chaplains (spiritual counselors) who can listen, pray, and be a comforting presence. You can also contact any of the resources in the "Resources at MSK" section for help.

If your child is having a scan, you can talk with one of our child life specialists. A

child life specialist is an expert in child development. They will help your child get ready for their scan and answer any questions you or your child have.

Join a support group

You may find it comforting to talk with other people going through cancer treatment. You can learn how others manage their scanxiety and remember that you're not alone.

- To learn about MSK's support groups, visit www.msk.org/counseling or call our Counseling Center at 646-888-0200.
- We also offer online support groups through our Virtual Programs. Visit www.msk.org/vp for more information.

Learn relaxation exercises

Relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, stretching, and meditation, can help you manage your scanxiety. These kinds of exercises can help you feel relaxed and calm. If your child is having a scan, your child life specialist can teach them relaxation exercises.

For more information about relaxation exercises:

- Listen to and follow along with *Breathing Exercises to Prepare for Procedures (Robin Hardbattle)* (www.mskcc.org/videos/breathing-exercises-prepare-procedures). This meditation will help you focus on your breathing to feel calm before your scan.
- Read *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative-therapies) to learn about the therapies offered by MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service. These therapies can help you build your coping skills and lessen your scanxiety.
- Visit www.msk.org/meditation to find meditations led by our Integrative Medicine and Wellness providers.

Learn more about scanxiety

The more you know about scanxiety, the more you will be able to manage it.

One of the best ways to learn about scanxiety is to hear from experts, such as MSK healthcare providers. They understand why patients have scanxiety and know how to keep them calm and relaxed. Watch to see MSK clinical experts explain what scanxiety is. They also offer tips on how to manage it.

Another great way to learn about scanxiety is to hear from other MSK patients who have it. Learning how they manage their own scanxiety can help you manage yours. Read *How to Ease Pre-Visit Anxiety: Tips from the MSK Community* (www.mskcc.org/news/how-ease-pre-visit-anxiety-tips-msk-community) to learn how other patients ease their scanxiety before a scan.

The day of your scan

Do relaxation exercises

On the morning of your appointment, try doing relaxation exercises, such as taking deep breaths, stretching, or meditating. These exercises can help you manage your stress, reduce your scanxiety, and feel more ready for your scan.

Talk with your radiology technologist

When you get to your appointment, ask your radiology technologist what will happen and how long the scan will take. This will help you know what to expect. You can also ask for items that will help make you comfortable inside the scanner. This can be a blanket, an eye mask, or headphones so you can listen to music.

Do calming activities while you wait

You can watch a movie on your phone or tablet, listen to music, or read a book. If your child is having a scan, bring some comfort items to keep them calm while they're waiting. This can be a toy they like to play with or a movie they like to watch.

Bring a friend or family member

A friend or family member can support you and help you stay calm while you're in the waiting room. They cannot be with you during your scan, but they can comfort you when you're finished.

If your child is having a scan, they can have 1 person with them at their appointment. This is usually a parent or caregiver.

- If your child will be awake during their scan, you can stay in the exam room with them.
- Some children may need anesthesia (medication to make them sleepy) for their scan. If your child is having their scan with anesthesia, you can stay with them until they fall asleep. Then, you will stay in the waiting room until the scan is finished.

To keep patients and staff safe and healthy, MSK's visitor policy may change from time to time. Visit www.msk.org/visit for the latest visitor policy information.

During your scan

Practice deep breathing, if your radiology technologist says it's OK

Deep breathing is an exercise you can do to help you relax during your scan. You can practice deep breathing during some, but not all scans, because it can disturb the imaging process.

Before your scan, ask your radiology technologist if you can practice deep breathing inside the scanner. If you can, they will give you instructions on what to do.

Try mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is another exercise you can do to help you relax during your scan. You can practice mindfulness meditation by following these steps:

1. If you can, close your eyes and think about being in a peaceful place.
2. If your radiology technologist says it's OK, breathe deeply and slowly. Focus

on your breathing. Feel the air going in and out of your nose and lungs.

   - You may not be allowed to breathe deeply because it may affect your scan. Before your scan, ask your radiology technologist if you can take deep breaths inside the scanner. If you can, they will give you instructions on what to do.

3. Notice how your body feels. Start from the top of your head. Move down slowly to the tip of your toes.
4. Relax each part of your body, one part at a time.

Tell your radiology technologist if you're uncomfortable

If you ever feel uncomfortable inside the scanner, tell your radiology technologist. They will do all they can to make sure you're comfortable. You can talk with them through speakers inside the scanner. Even if the noise inside the scanner seems loud, your radiology technologist will be able to hear you.

You may also have a special call button in the form of a squeeze ball. You can use this if you're having any problems during the scan. Squeezing the ball will let your radiology technologist know to stop the scan right away.

After your scan

Schedule time to go over your results

If you will get your results in person, schedule the appointment for as soon as possible after your scan. This way, you will not be wondering when you will hear from the healthcare provider who looked at your scan. Knowing you have an appointment can give you a sense of control. It can also help you feel more ready to get the results.

Contact your care team if your results are taking longer than normal

There are times when your results can take longer than normal. For example, your healthcare provider may ask other providers to look at the scan, which can increase your wait time.

Talk with a member of your care team if you're waiting for longer than you expected. They may be able to give you more information about when you will get your results.

If you feel comfortable, have a loved one with you when you get your results

Waiting for your scan results can also be stressful for your family and friends. Having a loved one with you when you get your results may be comforting for both you and them. If you will get your results in person, you can bring 1 person with you to your appointment.

To keep patients and staff safe and healthy, MSK's visitor policy may change from time to time. Visit www.msk.org/visit for the latest visitor policy information.

Keep yourself busy

While you're waiting for your results, fill your time by doing pleasant and relaxing activities, such as:

- Reading a book or magazine.
- Watching a movie or TV show.
- Listening to music or a podcast.
- Taking up a new hobby or learning a new skill.
- Exercising.
- Spending time with loved ones.
- Doing relaxation exercises.
- Taking a day trip.

Resources at MSK

We offer lots of different resources to help you and your loved ones manage scanxiety. No matter how you're feeling, we're here to support you and have resources that can help. Scanxiety can be treated.

Counseling Center
646-888-0200
www.msk.org/counseling
Many people find that counseling helps them deal with their feelings during

cancer treatment. Our counselors provide one-on-one counseling and counseling for couples, families, caregivers, and groups. They can also prescribe medications to help if you feel anxious or depressed. To make an appointment, ask your healthcare provider for a referral or call the phone number above.

Social Work

212-639-7020

www.msk.org/socialwork

Our social workers help patients, family, and friends deal with common issues for cancer patients, such as scanxiety. They provide one-on-one counseling and support groups throughout the course of treatment. They can also help you talk with your children and other family members. To talk with a social worker, call the phone number above.

Child Life Services

212-639-8285

www.msk.org/pediatrics/experience/life-pediatrics/child-life-services

Our Child Life Services help young patients and their families cope with treatment in the hospital setting. Our child life specialists are experts in child development. They teach coping skills that can help you and your child get ready for tests and treatments. They also offer one-on-one and group activities that fit each child's social, emotional, and learning needs. Through play, our child life specialists help children learn about their bodies. They also help children learn how to deal with stress and express their feelings. To talk with a child life specialist, call the phone number above.

Spiritual Care

212-639-5982

www.msk.org/experience/patient-support/counseling/spiritual-religious-care

Our chaplains are here to pray, help support family members, and contact community clergy or faith groups. They can also listen and simply be a comforting person and a spiritual presence. Anyone can ask for spiritual support, no matter what religion you practice. MSK's interfaith chapel is located near Memorial Hospital's main lobby. It's open 24 hours a day. If you have an emergency, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the chaplain on call.

Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service
646-449-1010
www.msk.org/integrativemedicine
Our Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service offers many therapies to go along with traditional medical care. These services include music therapy, mind and body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Services are offered to patients, their families and caregivers, and the general public. For more information, or to make an appointment, call the phone number above.

Use this space to write down questions for your care team:

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

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

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