

## **INFORMATION SHEET**

### **HOW CAN I RELAX?**

If you have cancer, or are caring for someone with cancer, you probably have many worries and fears. You may be trying to deal with cancer treatment and its side effects. You may also be worrying about finances, your job or trying to cope with family matters.

We are all used to juggling the demands of home and workplace, family and friends. But cancer can bring too many anxieties and problems at once. People often find their usual ways of coping are no longer enough. It is quite normal to feel tense, overwhelmed and even angry under such conditions. But there are ways to manage and relax.

#### **How do people react?**

Some people become short tempered or cannot sit still. Others become tired and feel as if they are thinking in a fog. You may feel anxious or depressed, and the feeling that you are not coping may make you feel worse. Headaches, stomach aches, sore back and shoulders, indigestion and difficulty sleeping are all symptoms of tension. Over a period of time, anxiety and tension may make people exhausted and physically ill.

#### **What you can do**

There are many approaches that people have found helpful. In this Information Sheet, we suggest some ways to help you deal with anxiety.

*There is no one 'right' answer'. Different methods work for different people. Experiment and find what works best for you. The key is to remain in control of your problems and anxieties, not to let them control you.*

#### **Learn about your illness**

Many people find that the more they know about their cancer, the more 'in control' they feel. They are better able to cope with the myths and misunderstanding about cancer, or the depressing stories that other people tell them. Remember, what has happened to others will not necessarily happen to you. Doctors and other health professionals are usually happy to answer your questions. Write your concerns and questions down before the visit to help you remember them. If you do not understand the doctor's explanation, ask him or her to explain in a different way.

*Your local Cancer Support Centre has a wide range of information resources freely available to people with cancer and their family and friends. If you cannot visit the Centre, call the **Cancer Helpline on 13 11 20** and information can be posted to you.*

#### **Talk it over**

Talking to other people can be a valuable way to deal with your problems and reduce the anxiety associated with them. Find someone with whom you feel comfortable. It may be someone close to you – a family member or a friend. It may be a health professional, support worker or a religious adviser. Call

the **Cancer Helpline** on **13 11 20** if you would like to talk to a trained **Cancer Connect** volunteer who has been through a similar experience.

### **Join a cancer support group**

In a support group you can talk to people who have been in a similar situation to you, and find out how they have managed. Your local Cancer Support Centre has details of support group meetings in your area.

### **Take care of yourself**

Take time out when you need it, and rest when you are tired. This is as important for carers as it is for people with cancer. Allow yourself to say “No” to things you can’t cope with, or visitors you simply don’t want to see. Or get someone else to say “No” for you.

### **Eat a balanced diet**

Sometimes you may not feel much like eating or preparing good food. But eating a balanced diet (even if you don’t eat a lot) will help you feel as well as possible. The dietician at your treatment centre will be able to help.

### **Exercise**

Even gentle exercise can help you to loosen up, release tension, and feel better and more relaxed. *If you have cancer, it is important to check with your doctor before you start an exercise program.*

### **Get enough sleep**

If you are tired and can’t sleep, relaxation techniques may help you. Let your doctors know if you are having trouble sleeping. They will be able to offer advice on how to sleep better.

### **Organise your time**

Do not try to do everything, but concentrate on doing the things that really matter. Do as much as you can – sometimes this may be less than you are used to. Helping yourself will make you feel in control.

### **Accept help**

Most people really want to help, but often don’t know how to ask. Ask a friend to drive you to the hospital, or pick up the kids, or walk the dog...

### **Do things you enjoy**

Keep up your hobbies. Try to get out of the house regularly, even if only for short outings. See a funny film – laughing is a wonderful way of feeling good. Escape into music for a while – anything you find relaxing or satisfying – Bach or Pink Floyd...

### **Religious or spiritual support**

Some people find comfort and strength in religion. Talk to someone who represents the faith you respect. You may find your illness helps you find new faith, or strengthens your existing faith.

### **Problem solving**

Sometimes problems can crowd around and you can’t see any way out. Try to take some time to sit down quietly and sort through the things that are worrying you. You might like to do this on your own, or with someone else – a friend, family member or professional counsellor.

Start by listing your different problems and worries, both large and small. Then choose one or two that you want to work on – things that can be changed or helped.

Then list some things you can do. Write down every solution you can think of, even the ones that seem silly. For instance, your list might include:

- Talking to your employer or union
- Accepting a friend's offer of help
- Running away
- Practicing relaxation or meditation every day
- Talking to your doctor about pain relief
- Organising a cleaner, or enquiring about available services
- Setting aside time just to be with your partner or children every day
- Organizing a roster for the family to help at home
- Having a weekend away

Select one or more solutions that seem realistic or possible, and give them a try. After a reasonable period, sit back again and decide how successful you have been.

### **Take control**

Learning to relax your mind and your body can help you to feel good and in control. You will feel calmer and more capable of thinking practically about your problems. Methods you could try include physical relaxation, meditation, hypnotherapy, yoga and t'ai chi.

### **Relax your body**

Learn to recognise when your body is tense. Sit quietly for a moment and 'listen' to what your body tells you. Is your breathing fast and shallow, or is it deeper and more relaxed? Are your hands clenched? Can you sit still easily? If you recognise when you are tense, you can do something about it.

You might like to join a relaxation class. You could buy a relaxation tape or CD to listen to at home. There are many tapes and CDs available for purchase. Listen before you buy, and choose one that suits you.

### **Meditation**

If you learn to quieten your mind, empty it of thoughts, the muscles of your body become calm and relaxed as well, and your heart and breathing slow down. This helps you to feel better and more in control of your life.

Meditation takes longer to learn than relaxation, and it needs to be practiced regularly. Twenty to forty minutes each day is usually enough, although some people choose to spend more time. There is no 'right' meditation method or teacher. Choose one that works for you. There are also many books, tapes and CDs available.

### **Massage**

Massage can be extremely relaxing, and will often relieve tension and discomfort. A good massage can make you feel wonderful. Gentle massage can be very pleasant to share with family or friends. Or have a professional massage. Many therapists will visit people at home or in hospital.

### **Hypnotherapy**

Hypnotherapy can relax your body and mind deeply. It can help you deal with anxiety and solve problems more effectively. It may also help to control pain and treatment side effects such as nausea. It is important to go a hypnotist who is properly qualified. This means a psychologist, doctor or dentist who practices hypnotherapy.

## T'ai chi

The ancient Chinese art of 'moving meditation', t'ai chi is slow, gentle, rhythmical and continuous movements like slow dancing or swimming in air. It requires about 30 minutes practice a day.

## Yoga

Yoga combines exercises for the body with 'exercises' for the mind. Like meditation, yoga is a skill that takes time to learn. There are forms of yoga to suit everyone, regardless of age or health

### ***Try this simple relaxation***

- *Find a warm, quiet place. Sit in a comfortable chair, hands resting loosely. Or lie on your back, arms resting by your side.*
- *Let yourself slow down and let your eyes close. Breathe in deeply, comfortably. Hold the air for a few seconds. Then let it go, breathe out, feel your body go loose and limp. Let the tension slip away as the air flows out. Repeat.*
- *With each breath out, feel more tension slide from your body. Breathe softly like this at your own natural rhythm while you start to focus on other parts of your body.*
- *Let your shoulders drop, and your arms, stomach, thighs and toes. Tension flows from them as you breathe softly. Sit quietly for a while. It feels good to be relaxed. When you are ready to return to your day, take a deep breath, move your hands and feet gradually and open your eyes. Bring the peace and calm with you.*

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### **CANCER SUPPORT CENTRES**

180-4 Collins Street  
5/ 216 Charles Street

HOBART  
LAUNCESTON

103 Oldaker Street  
54 Cattley Street

DEVONPORT  
BURNIE

**CANCER HELPLINE 13 11 20**

[www.cancertas.org.au](http://www.cancertas.org.au)