

Managing worry around cancer

It can be hard to know when to reach out to your care team when you're being treated for cancer or even after you've completed your treatment. Sometimes you may not be experiencing any concerning symptoms that require immediate medical care or you may no longer be having regular appointments with your care team, but you may still be experiencing negative thoughts about your diagnosis and cancer journey. It's important to be able to manage these negative thoughts when they are overwhelming or unhelpful and knowing when to ask for help from your care team.

Let's consider two types of worry:

1. A **"helpful" worry** might be something you've noticed and have evidence for, like experiencing more pain than before or a completely new symptom.
 - When you see evidence against that concern, you may feel better.
 - A helpful worry might motivate you to find a solution or check in with your care team.
2. An **"unhelpful" worry** might be a concern about something you're not experiencing, or not yet experiencing, or it might be a thinking trap.
 - When you see evidence against that concern, you still don't feel better. You may even feel worse.
 - It may be hard to stop having those negative thoughts and feelings.
 - You may be constantly thinking about the same topic without resolution.
 - The thoughts are accompanied by intense anxiety or panic attacks.
 - The thoughts prevent you from what you want to do, like getting good sleep or reaching out to your support network.

A few other strategies may manage "helpful" worry while you wait to connect with your doctor:

1. **Keep a list of new or concerning symptoms** and review the list at your next appointment. This can help you let go of worry in the moment, knowing you will have the opportunity to discuss it later. You can keep this list on your phone or notecard.
2. **Set aside a period of time every day to "worry."** Having a dedicated 10-15 minute period to worry can make your worry more manageable and productive. Counterintuitively, you may start worrying less throughout the day knowing there is another time for you to think on those topics. **We recommend not doing this near bedtime.**

If you are experiencing new or worsening symptoms, or are feeling worse, talk with your doctor, nurse or care team.