

# MANAGING STRESS

You may be feeling more stress than usual because of your cancer diagnosis. We have provided some information and resources to help during stressful situations.

## Signs & symptoms

### Physical:

- Muscle tension
- Stiff neck
- Cold sweaty hands
- Fatigue
- Tension headaches
- Facial tics
- High blood pressure
- Heart racing
- Back pain
- Jaw tension
- Nervous stomach
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Teeth grinding
- Appetite changes

### Emotional:

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Irritable
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Impatience
- Depression
- Nervousness
- Overwhelmed
- Apathy
- Loss of concentration

### Behavioural:

- Change in appetite
- Sleep disturbances
- Forgetfulness
- Angry outbursts
- Decline in productivity
- Social withdrawal
- Indecisive
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Increased use of caffeine or tobacco

## Tips for managing symptoms of stress

- **Check your thinking:** Sometimes we get carried away with our thoughts and worries. Ask yourself or a friend if your worries, fears, frustrations are reasonable or perhaps excessive. Remind yourself that you cannot solve all your problems at once and some problems have more than one answer.
- **Keep a realistic and appropriate perspective:** Remember that time helps work things out. This does not mean that some challenges will end or go away but it does help you remember that not everything has to be dealt with right away. Stepping back temporarily also gives you an opportunity to reflect upon all the alternatives and options.
- **Stay focused:** If you allow yourself time to think about all of your problems, needs and wants at any given moment you can become very overwhelmed. Instead of getting lost in all your thoughts, stay focused on one thing at a time. When you find your thoughts wandering, order yourself to stop; then, return to the one thing that you have chosen as your focus for that moment. You may want to use a journal to write in so you can reflect on things later and get them off your mind in the short term.
- **Manage your time:** Manage your time and tasks and accomplish what you can. Make a realistic list of tasks to do. Prioritize and schedule your tasks into your day. Break larger tasks down into smaller components. Keep an appointment book with times for your regular obligations and commitments. Write down anything that you must remember to include in that appointment such as questions to ask your healthcare professional.

# Managing Stress Toolbox

**Remember the acronym REDS (Reduce stress - Exercise 30 minutes per day - Diet/nutrition - Sleep)**

- Keep a diary or record of how and when stress increases and what makes you feel better. Let your cancer care team know if your symptoms are getting worse.
- Take time to learn about the benefits of mindfulness, relaxation and meditation in reducing stress.
- Download a relaxation app for your mobile device for a guided relaxation program.
- Attend a support program at your cancer centre, online or in your community.
- Practice relaxation techniques at home The following can get you started:
  - New patient educational video: Managing Stress While Living With Cancer  
[www.bccancer.bc.ca/managingstressvideo](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/managingstressvideo)
  - Audio stream Mindfulness & Meditation and Relaxation & Guided Imagery playlists on Soundcloud -  
<https://soundcloud.com/phsabc> using your mobile device or computer Download the free Soundcloud app from an app store (search BC Cancer)
  - Deep Breathing Exercises (see handout)
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercises (see handout)
- Exercise can reduce the negative effects of stress on your body. 30 minutes of moderate exercise three times weekly is recommended. Talk with your family doctor before you start a new exercise plan so that you can realistically manage before, during and after cancer treatment. Exercise Support can now be found at [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca) - Coping with Cancer - Exercise Support.
- Practice good eating habits (as needed, call a registered dietitian at Health Link BC 8-1-1 toll-free) Good nourishment is required for both physical and mental energy as well as emotional stability. Limit sweets and other “junk” foods. Drink plenty of fluids.
- Practice good sleep habits. Find a “Strategies to help with Sleep” handout on the BC Cancer website.
- Listen to calming music, be creative and take part in pleasant distractions. Our BC Cancer, Mindfulness & Meditation and Relaxation & Guided Imagery playlists are available on Soundcloud.
- If medications are a part of your health care plan, take them as prescribed. Do not stop taking medications without first checking with your doctor.
- Humor and fun can be a wonderful stress reducer. Watch a comedy or call a friend who makes you laugh.
- Sometimes you may need to take a break from talking about your cancer and sometimes you may need to talk things through with another person. It might be a family member or a friend or you may need the help of a professional counsellor. Call and make an appointment with Patient & Family Counselling Services at your cancer centre.
- Take a course on “Managing Anxiety” through Keltyskey - [www.keltyskey.com/](http://www.keltyskey.com/)