

What is cancer-related anxiety?

Cancer-related anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear or being nervous. It can come and go. Things like starting treatment or waiting for test results can make anxiety worse.

Low-level anxiety can make you:

- Feel restless, worried and like you cannot relax
- Have tense muscles
- Have trouble sleeping

High-level anxiety can cause anxiety attacks that come on quickly and are strong. They can cause:

- Feelings of doom
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness and nausea
- Chest pains

What can I do to help my anxiety?

1. Find support

Support from family, friends and your community can make you feel better and less alone.

These tips can help you get support:

- Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener
- Talk to someone at your place of worship
- Join a cancer support program to share stories with other people
- Talk to a social worker about support programs at your cancer centre

At Walker Family Cancer Centre, Call 905-682-6451 and Press 2 to book an appointment with a social worker.

2. Focus on things that make you feel better

Think about the positive parts of your life and things you can control.

These tips can help you feel better:

- Feel grateful for the things and people that bring you joy
- Spend time with people who make you laugh
- Try to avoid negative people and things that cause you stress

3. Face your fears

Anxiety can cause you to avoid people or situations that make you feel anxious. This is called avoidance behaviour.

Different types of anxiety can cause you to avoid different things:

- Panic disorder → crowds
- Social anxiety → interacting with people
- Phobias → things like needles or closed in spaces, like MRI machines

Tell your health care team if you feel anxious about tests, treatments, or appointments. They can help.

2. Improve your sleep

Getting good sleep can give you more energy and help you feel better emotionally.

These tips can help improve your sleep:

- Do relaxing activities like reading or listening to music before going to bed
- If you do not fall asleep after 20-30 minutes, get out of bed. Only go back to bed when you feel like you may be able to fall asleep

3. Exercise and take care of your body

Exercise is a good way to help your anxiety and improve your mood.

Try these tips when exercising:

- Choose an activity you like that suits your health and fitness level
- Start slowly with light exercise like walking, swimming or yoga
- Go at your own pace. Slowly increase the amount and difficulty of your activities

4. Avoid alcohol and quit smoking

- Even small amounts of alcohol can affect the way you feel
- The nicotine in cigarettes can also make your anxiety worse
- It may help to cut down or quit smoking but sometimes people feel more nervous or on edge when they are quitting
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about making a plan that is right for you