



# Coping with Cancer

*Ways to manage the effects of a cancer diagnosis*

February, 2018

February is National  
Cancer Prevention  
Month!

Risk Factors for cancer include:

Family history of cancer  
Increasing age  
Smoking  
Radiation exposure  
which include sunlight

...and more

To learn more about Cancer prevention visit:

[https://  
www.cancer.org/  
healthy.html](https://www.cancer.org/healthy.html)

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## Chronic Stress Can Make Us Sick

Stress is the mental tension or worry caused by either demands in daily life, or sometimes by unprecedented traumatic events. Many times, getting diagnosed with cancer, or losing a loved one due to cancer can be a stressful time for patients and their family.

It is common for stress to increase when you or someone in your family is diagnosed with cancer. Additional physical, emotional, and mental stresses can come from the disease itself or treat-

ment, changes in your work, family and social relationships or from financial burdens. Trying to cope with all of the “stressors” that accompany a cancer diagnosis, can leave you vulnerable to chronic stress.

We all experience a certain amount of temporary stress in day-to-day living. When we feel threatened or in danger, our bodies naturally prompt stress hormones, like cortisol, to be released so that we can react to a situation quickly. The

stress hormones generally produce increased heart and breathing rates, decreased digestive activity and increased liver-released glucose. Once the stressor is no longer threatening, the body quickly returns to its normal state.



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## *New!* *Videos with Cancer Answers*

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, the Alabama Cancer Control Coalition and the Alabama Department of Public Health have recently released a series of short videos aimed at helping people understand cancer.

These videos can be accessed from anywhere and are shared with community health centers and treatment centers throughout the country. UAB health professionals answer ques-

tions about prevention, nutrition, exercise, fertility, survivorship, insurance, treatment effects, and much, much more. To start learning, CLICK ON THIS LINK: [UAB CCC](#)



## Stress and Cancer, cont.

But with chronic stress the body stays in a constant state of “fight or flight”. After a while, this has a harmful affect on our hormonal levels, immune system and our emotional state leaving us more vulnerable to infections and serious illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, cancer recurrence or depression.

While it is important to note that psychological stress alone cannot induce cancer, it may make you more likely to engage in unhealthy coping behaviors that can lead to increasing your chance of some types of cancer. Smoking, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug addiction are harmful actions that can increase your chances of getting cancer or other health problems.

The good news is that properly coping with stress can dramatically improve your quality of life while being treated for cancer.

*Sources: National Cancer Institute, Simply Psychology Organization*

### Natural & Safe Ways to Reduce Stress

- Eat well; make healthy, nutritious decisions
- Develop good sleeping habits
- Exercise regularly
- Allow yourself private time and space
- Focus on what you can change to gain a greater sense of control over your situation
- Use mindfulness, meditation, and other relaxation techniques
- Spiritual/ religious guidance
- Communication with friends and family to encourage a strong support system
- Counseling or talk therapy
- Attending support groups or cancer information sessions
- Keep a journal or blog



## Sleep and Cancer

Contributing Author: Carolina Salvador M.D., UAB Division of Hematology and Oncology. Dr. Salvador’s research interests include preventative medicine, integrative medicine and minority health-related issues. She answers questions related to the real importance of sleep and how it plays in to your

**Q:** *Do cancer patients have specific issues regarding sleep?*

**Dr. Salvador:** Patients suffering from cancer have more problems with lack or poor quality of sleep than people without cancer. Fifty percent of cancer patients suffer from sleep disorders compared to 15% in the people without cancer. Insomnia (lack of sleep) can present as difficulty falling asleep, waking up several times during the night, or waking up early with being able to go back to sleep. For cancer patients, certain medications, hospitalization, chemo, radiation, or hormonal therapy, pain, hot flashes, nausea and vomiting as well and anxiety and depression can keep them from getting much needed sleep.

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**Q:** *Is there a certain number of hours cancer patients should sleep?*

**Dr. Salvador:** For a healthy patient 6 to 8 hours of sleep would suffice. A person with cancer would need to sleep at least as much, taking into account how much they slept before the diagnosis as well as their age. However, if a person feels he/she is sleeping too much, mentioning to a doctor is a good idea.

**Q:** *What about cancer survivors? Will their body ever return to “normal” or will their body demand more sleep than average?*

**Dr. Salvador:** Some survivors continue to have sleep problems. The cause of this is unknown. Some studies have suggested that a good sleep routine may increase survival.

**Q:** *What should someone do if they have trouble staying asleep or cannot stay asleep?*

**Dr. Salvador:** There are some simple, basic things to try to improve the sleep. The first thing they should do is address the problem with their physician/oncologist who can prescribe the treatments that may work best. They can also refer the patient to a psychologist, an integrative oncologist, physical therapy, etc.

**Q:** *How does sleep play in to stress?*

**Dr. Salvador:** Stress usually causes a person to lose sleep and the less sleep the more fatigue; the more fatigue the less able to deal with stress, ending in a cycle difficult to treat unless caught on time. A cancer patient needs to make his/her oncologist aware of how much stress is a problem how is affecting his/her quality of life. Then the oncologist can refer them to get the care they need.

**Q:** *Do cancer patients tend to need more sleep than non-cancer patients? Is there different sleep needs for cancer patients?*

**Dr. Salvador:** Everyone needs sleep to maintain a normal, but cancer patients need sleep more to help their bodies fighting the cancer and dealing with the added stress of the disease and the treatment. Sleep allows the body to restore its energy, repair damaged tissues and keep a healthy immune system. Thus with lack of sleep, fatigue sets in, the immune system becomes more vulnerable and every activity is becomes more cumbersome. It also increases the risk of depression. Therefore, good sleep habits help the body recover from illnesses as well as from cancer and its treatment.



### *How to get a good night's sleep*

- Limit or discontinue caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Daytime naps should only be 15-20 minutes.
- Avoid activities in the evening (such as exercise, stressful movie, computers, etc.) that can stimulate you. Instead use restful music, reading or relaxation techniques in the evening hours.
- Follow a sleep routine. Go to bed and get up around the same time.
- If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and try another form of relaxation.
- Do not use the bed to read or watch TV. Train your body to know that your bed is for rest.
- Try complementary therapy approaches like mindfulness meditation, yoga, guided imagery/hypnosis, muscle relaxation exercises.
- Some herbs and supplements can be helpful. However, consult an integrative medicine oncologist who can recommend those that will work best for you without interfering with your treatment. He or she can also help you understand the correct doses.

## Upcoming **CANCERcare**® Webinars

### **Advances in the Treatment of Lung Cancer**

Part I of Living With Lung Cancer

Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 12:30 – 1:30 pm, CentralTime

**To register:**

[https://www.cancercare.org/connect\\_workshops/636-advances\\_treatment\\_lung\\_cancer\\_2018-02-06](https://www.cancercare.org/connect_workshops/636-advances_treatment_lung_cancer_2018-02-06)

### **Update on Thyroid Cancer**

Friday, February 9, 2018, 12:30 – 1:30 pm , Central Time

**To Register:**

[https://www.cancercare.org/connect\\_workshops/633-update\\_thyroid\\_cancer\\_2018-02-09](https://www.cancercare.org/connect_workshops/633-update_thyroid_cancer_2018-02-09)

### **For Caregivers: Practical Tips to Cope with Your Loved One's Lung Cancer**

Tuesday, February 13, 2018, 12:30 – 1:30 pm , Central Time

**To Register:**

[https://www.cancercare.org/connect\\_workshops/637-caregivers\\_practical\\_tips\\_cope\\_with\\_loved\\_ones\\_lung\\_cancer\\_2018-02-13](https://www.cancercare.org/connect_workshops/637-caregivers_practical_tips_cope_with_loved_ones_lung_cancer_2018-02-13)

### **Managing Eye and Vision Changes Related to Cancer Treatments**

Monday, February 26, 2018, 12:30 – 1:30 pm , Central Time

**To Register:**

[https://www.cancercare.org/connect\\_workshops/638-managing\\_eye\\_vision\\_changes\\_cancer\\_treatments\\_2018-02-26](https://www.cancercare.org/connect_workshops/638-managing_eye_vision_changes_cancer_treatments_2018-02-26)

### **Triple Negative Breast Cancer in the African American Community**

Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 1:30 – 2:45 pm Central Time

**To Register:**

[https://www.cancercare.org/connect\\_workshops/633-update\\_thyroid\\_cancer\\_2018-02-09](https://www.cancercare.org/connect_workshops/633-update_thyroid_cancer_2018-02-09)

***For community programs to support you this month, check out our calendar of February events!***

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CANCER CENTER

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suggestions*

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Knowledge that will change your world