



# **Coping with Chemotherapy**

# PURPOSE

The purpose of the booklet is to help you learn three new coping skills. These three skills have been shown to be very useful in coping with the stress of chemotherapy. They are:

*Deep Breathing*  
*Active Relaxation*  
*Positive Thinking*

Take time now to learn more about these skills and how they might help you.

## **HOW DO YOU PLAN TO COPE WITH CHEMOTHERAPY?**

Chemotherapy is one of the most common and effective ways of treating many forms of cancer. However, the same treatment that works against cancer can cause side effects such as nausea, pain, fatigue, and hair loss. These side effects can affect your health. They can also get in the way of feeling good, disrupt daily activities, and put a strain on personal relationships. For these reasons, many people find going through chemotherapy to be a stressful time.

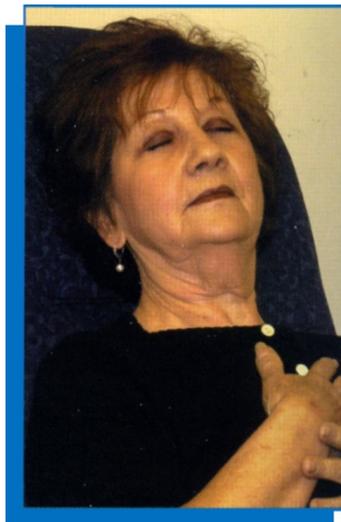
How you cope with stress during chemotherapy is important. Studies show that people who find ways to cope with stress during chemotherapy feel better physically. They are less tired and better able to do more of their usual daily activities as they go through treatment. The benefits of coping with stress can be emotional, too. Dealing with stress can help your mood at a time when it feels like much of what is happening to you is beyond your control.

Think about how you cope with stress. Do you share your feelings and concerns with friends or family? Do you take time out to do something fun and enjoyable? These familiar ways of coping can help now as you go through chemotherapy. This may also be a time to learn new ways of coping.

# DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing is a simple and effective way to relieve tension and increase comfort.

*Learn this technique in just a few minutes by following these steps:*



1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Do not cross your arms and legs.
2. Place the palm of one hand on the middle of your chest. Place the other palm on your abdomen (the area between the bottom of your ribcage and your navel).
3. Breathe as you normally do. Feel the rise and fall of your hands as you breathe in and out.
4. Imagine now as you breathe in that your stomach is a balloon that inflates, raising the hand that is resting on your abdomen. As you breathe out, the balloon deflates and your hand falls. (The first few times you try this, it may be helpful to push your abdomen in gently with your hand as you breathe out).
5. Keep breathing from your abdomen for a few minutes. To stay focused on your breathing, silently count each time you breathe in ("1 ... 2 ... 3 ... ") and say "relax" to yourself each time you breathe out. As you breathe from your abdomen, you will feel the comfort that comes from being able to control your breathing.

# TIPS ON USING DEEP BREATHING

## *Before chemotherapy starts:*

1. Practice deep breathing for at least 5 minutes each day.
2. Stay focused on your breathing as you practice.
3. Feel the comfort and relaxation that comes from deep breathing.

## *Once chemotherapy starts:*

1. Use deep breathing to feel less tense before or during a chemotherapy treatment.
2. Use deep breathing to feel more comfortable if you are fatigued, nauseated, or in pain between chemotherapy treatments.
3. Use deep breathing to feel more relaxed whenever you are stressed.



***Stop now and practice deep breathing for 5 minutes.***

### ***What patients say about deep breathing:***

"There are so many things that are not in your control. Deep breathing gives you a sense that you are taking part in your care."

"On the ride over here while my wife was driving, I would just sit back and relax and breathe deeply, and make an effort to relax and get it all out of my mind. That really helped"

"I think the breathing helped a lot. It took my attention away from the stress."

# ACTIVE RELAXATION

Active relaxation can be used with deep breathing to give even more relief from physical and emotional discomfort. Active relaxation requires more training than deep breathing, but it is worth the effort. Studies show that patients who use active relaxation are less tired and less upset during chemotherapy than patients who use only their own ways of coping.



## *To learn active relaxation, you will need:*

- The audiotape/CD included in your kit.
- An audiotape/CD player with headphones.

The 30-minute audiotape/CD guides you through a complete training session in active relaxation. Listen to it right after you finish reading page 5 of this booklet.

Active relaxation begins with a series of exercises in which you gently tense and relax certain muscles. As you listen to the audiotape/CD, you start with the muscles in your arms. You then tense and relax the muscles in your legs, back, and shoulders. Be sure to avoid tensing muscles or areas of your body that are painful.

Next, you are guided through a few minutes of relaxing imagery. Relaxing imagery is like daydreaming. The instructions on the audiotape ask you to close your eyes and imagine that you are in a comfortable position, looking up at the clouds on a beautiful day. Try to imagine the sounds that might go along with this image, such as birds singing or leaves rustling. Use this image to deepen the sense of relaxation that comes from tensing and relaxing your muscles.

# TIPS ON USING ACTIVE RELAXATION

## *Before chemotherapy starts:*

- Practice active relaxation at least once each day by listening to the audiotape/CD.
- Practice in a quiet place while sitting in a comfortable chair or reclining on a couch or bed.
- Try to create your own image of a peaceful, relaxing scene.
- Practice active relaxation without the audiotape/CD when you feel ready.

## *Once chemotherapy starts:*

- Use active relaxation to feel less tense before or during a chemotherapy treatment.
- Use active relaxation to feel more comfortable if you are fatigued, nauseated, or in pain between chemotherapy treatments.
- Use active relaxation to unwind if you are having difficulty resting or falling asleep.



***Stop now and practice active relaxation for 5 minutes.***

### ***What patients say about active relaxation:***

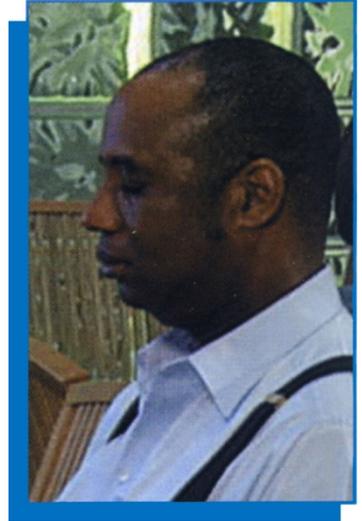
"By being able to relax, I slept better at night."

"The images would help me stay relaxed during the treatment, not thinking about what was going to happen beyond."

"It was not uncommon that, after finishing tensing and relaxing, I would fall asleep. It was a very helpful approach."

# POSITIVE THINKING

Your own thoughts can be another major source of stress during chemotherapy. When negative thoughts and worries keep running through your mind, you can feel worse both physically and emotionally.



Positive thinking is an effective way of getting control over these troubling thoughts. To shift from negative to positive thinking you need to be able to:

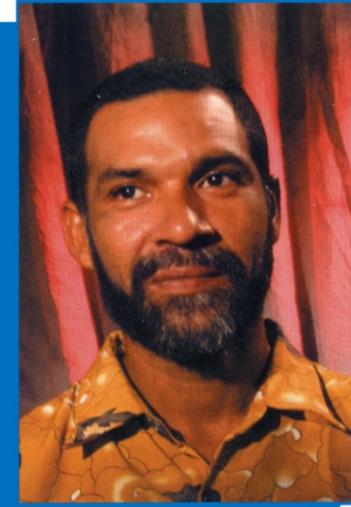
## STOP, THINK, and FOCUS

**STOP** when you sense stress. Be aware of the mental signs of stress: racing thoughts or increased irritability. Be aware of the physical signs, too: a stiff neck, a rapid pulse, or a hollow feeling in the pit of your stomach. The first step to getting in control when stressed is to stop and know you are stressed.

**THINK** about what you might be saying to yourself. When you are stressed you are probably telling yourself negative things like, "I doubt I will be able to get through this," or "How can I deal with this?" Sometimes these thoughts seem to happen so fast you may not even be aware of them until you force yourself to slow down and think about what is going on.

**FOCUS** on more positive thoughts. Remember, your own thoughts can either work for you or against you when dealing with stress. To control negative thoughts, you need to focus on more positive thoughts. Take the time now to write down some positive statements on page 11 about coping with stress. When you are feeling stressed, read those positive statements to yourself.

*To control negative thoughts, you need to focus on more positive thoughts.*



## **EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE STATEMENTS**

"The stress I am feeling is a signal. It is time to start using one of my ways of coping."

"Worrying about the future is not helpful. I need to focus on the here and now and on making myself more comfortable."

"I can deal with this. All I need to do is take a deep breath and relax. Then, I will feel more in control."

# TIPS ON USING POSITIVE THINKING

## *Before chemotherapy starts:*

1. Write down your own positive statements on the cards included in this kit (See page 11).
2. Practice positive thinking by reading the positive statements to yourself at least once each day.

## *Once chemotherapy starts:*

1. **STOP, THINK,** and **FOCUS** whenever you notice signs of mental or physical stress.
2. Keep your cards with positive statements handy. Read them to yourself when you are stressed.

### ***What patients say about positive thinking:***

"When you start focusing on your phrase, replacing a negative thought with a positive thought, you find that it is not always as bad as what the mind thinks it is."

"As you say your positive statement, it begins to have a very calming effect. It feels like you have taken something and it is calming you down, only it is better because you have done it through your own mental attitude."

## THE NEXT STEP

Deep breathing, active relaxation, and positive thinking are skills that take practice. It is no different from learning skills like how to ride a bike or play tennis. The first few times you try deep breathing, active relaxation, and positive thinking it may feel odd or strange. But, with practice you will find that it becomes easier and easier to use these skills and that you feel more relaxed, more comfortable, and more in control.

Because it takes time to learn these skills, it is important that you practice before the start of chemotherapy. If you wait until chemotherapy starts, you will not be ready to use the skills when you need them. Set aside one hour each day to practice all three skills. When it is time to practice, close the door and turn off the phone. Give your full attention to learning each technique. You may find it helpful to view the videotape/DVD again or read this booklet again at the start of a practice session.



Practice One Hour  
Each Day

**A final word.** The skills described in this booklet can be used along with the medications your doctor may have prescribed for you for relief of physical or emotional discomfort. Do not stop taking any prescribed medication until you have checked with your doctor.

# SUMMARY

Chemotherapy can be a stressful time. Finding ways to cope with stress during chemotherapy can make a difference in how you feel both physically and emotionally. Besides using familiar ways of coping, take time to learn and use deep breathing, active relaxation, and positive thinking.

## *Once you have learned these skills:*

1. Use them to calm yourself if you feel tense before or during chemotherapy treatments.
2. Use them to feel more comfortable if you are nauseated, fatigued, or in pain between treatments.
3. Use them to help you rest or fall asleep.
4. Use them to feel more in control when negative thoughts challenge your ability to cope.

### ***What patients say about "Coping with Chemotherapy":***

"It made a difference, physically and mentally. It really helped to prepare me."

"It not only helped me get through treatment, it helped me deal with my cancer and everything that goes with it."

"The feeling of control, that is the biggest value. I have a lot more confidence that I can deal with this treatment. I have the tools to deal with it."

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY OWN STATEMENT:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Coping with Chemotherapy

---

Special thanks to the many patients and staff members for their interest, time and help in developing this booklet.

## *Developed by*

Paul B. Jacobsen, Ph.D., and Cathy D. Meade, Ph.D., R.N, F.A.A.N.

H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

At the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida

2006

Preparation of this booklet was made possible by research grants from the American Cancer Society (PBR-99) and the National Cancer Institute (CA70895); Paul B. Jacobsen, Ph.D., Principal Investigator.



©1996, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center &  
Research Institute and the University of South Florida  
Revised 6/2003, 2/2006