

STRESS REDUCTION

Stress is a part of our lives and how we handle that stress can have an impact on our health. It is thought that stress may fuel cancer by triggering a 'master switch' gene which allows the disease to spread, according to new research, so behavioral factors and responses to stress must be considered along with genetic factors in attempting to understand why some individuals develop cancer, or what the clinical course will be. Research has shown that stress can lower the body's ability to prevent cancer from developing. Typically, our immune system recognizes those abnormal cells and kills them before they produce a tumor. There are 3 important things that can happen to prevent cancer from developing — the immune system can prevent the agents from invading in the first place, DNA can repair the abnormal cells or killer T-cells can kill off cancer cells.

Learning to cope with stress is not an easy task. Most of us never forget the day we were diagnosed with cancer. As that date approaches each year, our fears can increase. Follow-up appointments and any imaginary or real new symptoms can have the same effect. Sometimes, just walking through the hospital doors can be scary. Levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, rise with increased stress. High levels of cortisol suppress immune response by reducing natural killer cell activity. Studies suggest that imbalances in cortisol levels can cause tumors to grow faster. That is one reason we need to learn how to cope with everyday stress, including the fear of recurrent cancer. We may not have control over cancer recurrence, but we can have control over the worry. None of us know how long we will live and we need to enjoy whatever time we have.

Some helpful stress reduction techniques are:

- **Let go of what you cannot control** - Meditation, prayer or mindfulness training can help separate the processes of our mind (which will often go for the 'worst case scenario') from what is really happening in our life.
- **Get the help you need**- Support groups, therapies, telephone hotlines and help with the daily tasks can help to free up precious emotional energy. Stay involved with people; don't isolate.
- **Humor**- Laughter really is good medicine.
- **Distraction**- Keep busy. Go to a movie, go for a hike, have lunch with a friend. Do anything that can take your mind off your fear.
- **Have a good cry**- Whether you do it alone or with others, crying can release feelings of fear.
- **Make your life reflect you**- Your life is your own. Make it reflect your beliefs, and your choices. *Do what you love.*

Studies show that a variety of interventions reduce negative biological stress effects and can benefit women with breast cancer.

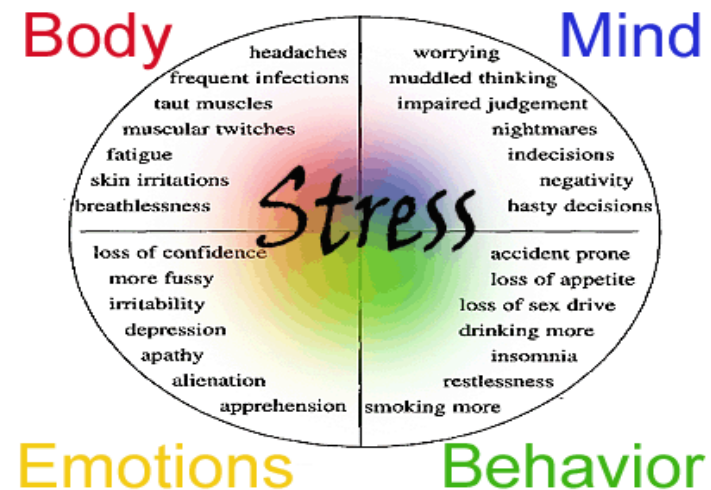
Many complementary therapies enhance healing and reduce stress by focusing on the connections between the mind, body, and spirit. Three main types of therapy are psychological, such as support groups; physical, such as deep relaxation and exercise; religious and spiritual, such as prayer and meditation. It is important to be aware that there is no evidence that these therapies will actually cure cancer. Nonetheless, these methods have been proven extremely helpful to people with cancer in a number of ways.

They can:

- Reduce the stress and anxiety that accompany a cancer diagnosis.
- Control some symptoms of cancer.
- Ease some side effects caused by conventional cancer treatments.
- Improve overall health.
- Help identify what is important in life and develop a greater sense of well-being.
- Provide help in coping with the struggles people with cancer may face.

Some of the most common techniques people use to reduce stress are:

Art Therapy	Massage Therapy
Meditation Prayer	Biofeedback
Psychotherapy	Exercise
Qi Gong/Tai Chi	Guided Imagery
Yoga	Hypnosis
Joining a Support Group	



RESOURCES

Omega Institute

www.eomega.org

United Breast Cancer Foundation

www.ubcf.info