



## Coping with Advanced Cancer

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**Acceptance.** Feelings of guilt are common in families dealing with advanced cancer. You may feel guilty about being ill or being a burden on your loved ones. Your loved ones may feel guilty about not knowing how to help you. Try not to blame yourselves. Instead, try to accept the situation and use your inner strength to move forward.

**Decide what is best for you.** With advanced cancer, your treatment goals may change. You have a right to decide what is best for you, even if some decisions may be difficult for others to accept. You may or may not decide to pursue aggressive treatment. Think about what is important to you now and communicate your priorities to your cancer team and your loved ones.

**Set goals.** Think about how to live your life as fully and best as possible. While you may prefer to focus on the present and take it one day at a time, it can help to set small goals for each day, such as taking a walk, making a phone call, having lunch with a friend, reading a chapter of a book, etc. Finding small things in life to look forward to each day can help you feel more productive and fulfilled.

**Manage your symptoms.** The symptoms of advanced cancer can be a challenge. Physical symptoms can cause a lot of discomfort and can impact your quality of life. It is essential that you work with your cancer team to manage side effects, such as pain, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, etc. Improving physical symptoms can also improve your mood, stress level, and overall well being.

**Share with your loved ones.** Having advanced cancer can make you feel alone sometimes, even in the company of others. It's better to express your feelings rather than hold them in. Sharing with your loved ones can bring you comfort and help you make sense of things. You may want to write down your thoughts, memories, lessons learned, or other things that are meaningful to share with your loved ones.

**Anticipate changes in the family.** Advanced cancer changes the way family members relate to one another. Roles within the family change when you relinquish some tasks and other family members take on new tasks. These changes in family roles can be upsetting for both you and your loved ones. Find ways to work together and communicate your feelings so you can better adjust.

**Plan ahead.** Even when you are healthy, it helps to be prepared and make provisions for your family if the worst happens. Although it's difficult to talk about these issues, if you have not already done so, you may decide to update your affairs through an advance directive or living will. Planning ahead can also help you worry less about the future, take control of the situation, and protect those you love most. (*see reverse*)

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**Seek emotional support.** Feeling lost and afraid is completely normal during this time. It is important to find support so you can express these feelings. Aside from family and friends, share your feelings and concerns with others who are dealing with advanced cancer. In addition to support groups, you may also decide to seek private counseling with a mental health professional.

**Nurture your spiritual well-being.** Advanced cancer can make you think about your beliefs. You may want to understand your purpose, or you may want to forgive yourself or others for past actions. Spirituality can be a source of strength and peace. Prayer, meditation, spending time in nature, writing in a journal, volunteer work, and meeting with a spiritual counselor are just a few of the ways you can nurture your spiritual well-being.

**Make the most of each day.** Try to participate in activities that matter most to you. Creative outlets, such as drawing, painting, music, and poetry can help you express yourself, relieve stress, and get your mind off cancer. You could also keep a journal, read a book, watch a funny movie or TV show, go fishing, garden, play cards, do crossword puzzles, make a scrapbook, do relaxation exercises or yoga, and spend time with family and friends.

**Stay hopeful.** Advanced cancer can change the way you look at life. It's important to stay hopeful. While what you hope for may change over time, hope can give you a sense of purpose and motivate you. You may have hope for relief from symptoms and slowing down the growth of the cancer, or hope for peace, acceptance, and good times with family and friends.

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