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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Managing Anxiety

This information explains what anxiety is and how to manage it.

## About anxiety

Anxiety is a strong feeling of worry or fear. It's a common and normal reaction to cancer and cancer treatment. How anxious you feel may be different at different times during your treatment. You may feel anxious before starting a new treatment or while you're waiting for test results. You may also feel anxious after finishing treatment if you're worried that the cancer might come back.

Feelings of anxiety can range from mild uneasiness to overwhelming panic. Anxiety can make it harder for you to manage your cancer treatment. It can also affect your daily life and relationships. This is why it's important to be aware of the signs of anxiety and learn what you can do to help manage them.

## Signs of anxiety

Anxiety can cause physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, or both. The following things can be signs of anxiety:

- Nervousness.
- Fatigue (feeling more tired and weak than usual).
- Uncontrollable worrying.
- A faster heart rate than usual.
- Headaches.
- Trouble sleeping.

- Trembling or shaking.
- Sweating.
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded.
- Chest pain.
- Muscle tension.
- Dry mouth.
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up).
- Shortness of breath.
- Loss of appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering.

If you have any of these signs, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section for help.

## How to manage your anxiety

The first step in managing your anxiety is to talk about how you feel. Your healthcare provider and social worker can reassure, support, and guide you. It's always a good idea to let your healthcare team know how you, your family, and your friends are feeling emotionally. There are many resources available to you and your family.

Here are some ways you can manage your anxiety during your cancer treatment.

- **Do some light physical activity.** Light physical activity can be going for a walk or a short bike ride. Physical activity can help improve your mood and relieve stress. Talk with your healthcare provider before starting new exercises.
  - Exercise with MSK's clinical fitness specialists in Integrative Medicine's video series by visiting [www.msk.org/exercise\\_with\\_msk](http://www.msk.org/exercise_with_msk). Videos include aerobics, strength training, core work, and gentle

stretches.

- Try tai chi with videos featuring MSK’s martial arts instructor by visiting [www.msk.org/taichi](http://www.msk.org/taichi). Tai chi is a gentle form of exercise that can be done at home to increase balance, steady breathing, and reduce anxiety.
- **Stay connected to your family and friends.** While you may not be able to be with your loved ones in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, you can call, text, and video chat with them. You may find it helpful to plan daily calls with your loved ones that you can look forward to. You can also try video chatting with your family during meals or to play games together. It’s important to create a support system for yourself during your cancer treatment. Anxiety can make this hard to do but staying connected to people who can support and talk with you about your experience can help ease your worries. For more information, read .
- **Get emotional support.** MSK has many professionals, volunteers, and support programs that can help you cope with your anxiety. You can contact any of the resources in the “Resources at MSK” section below for help.
- **Join a group.** You may also find it comforting to speak with other people going through cancer treatment in one of our support groups. For more information, call our Counseling Center at 646-888-0200 or visit [www.msk.org/counseling](http://www.msk.org/counseling).
  - We also offer online support groups through our Virtual Programs. Visit [www.msk.org/vp](http://www.msk.org/vp) for more information.
- **Learn relaxation techniques.** Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, and acupressure (putting pressure on parts of your body to help you relax) can help you manage your anxiety. Ask your healthcare provider for more information on relaxation techniques.
  - Listen to and follow along with the Integrative Medicine Service’s free meditations on [www.msk.org/meditation](http://www.msk.org/meditation).
  - You can also try acupressure to help relieve anxiety. To learn how to do acupressure on yourself, read *Acupressure for Stress and Anxiety*

([www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure\\_anxiety](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_anxiety)). Depending on your treatment, you may bruise easily so talk to your healthcare provider before trying acupressure.

- For more information about integrative medicine therapies that can help with anxiety during your cancer treatment, read *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative\\_therapies](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies)).
- **Medication.** If your anxiety is getting in the way of your daily activities, medication may be helpful. Different types of medications are available to treat anxiety. For more information, talk with your healthcare provider or call 646-888-0200 to make an appointment with the Counseling Center.

If anxiety is affecting your life in any way, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also contact any of the resources below for help. We can help you find the right treatment for you.

## Resources at MSK

### Social Work

[www.msk.org/socialwork](http://www.msk.org/socialwork)

212-639-7020

Social workers help patients, families, and friends deal with common issues for people who have cancer. They provide individual counseling and support groups throughout your treatment. They can help you communicate with children and other family members.

Our social workers can also help refer you to community agencies and programs. They also have information about financial resources, if you're having trouble paying your bills.

If you're interested in joining an online support group, visit the Virtual Programs website at [www.msk.org/vp](http://www.msk.org/vp) for more information and to sign up.

## Counseling Center

[www.msk.org/counseling](http://www.msk.org/counseling)

646-888-0200

Many people find that counseling helps them. Our counseling center offers counseling for individuals, couples, families, and groups. We can also prescribe medications to help if you feel anxious or depressed. To make an appointment, ask your healthcare provider for a referral or call the number above.

## Spiritual Care

212-639-5982

Our chaplains (spiritual counselors) are available to listen, help support family members, and pray. They can contact community clergy or faith groups, or simply be a comforting companion and a spiritual presence. Anyone can ask for [spiritual support](#). You do not have to have a religious affiliation (connection to a religion).

MSK's interfaith chapel is located near Memorial Hospital's main lobby. It's open 24 hours a day. If you have an emergency, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the chaplain on call.

## Integrative Medicine Service

[www.msk.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.msk.org/integrativemedicine)

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. To schedule an appointment for these services, call 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service. They will work with you to come up with a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. To make an appointment, call 646-608-8550.

## Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC)

646-888-8106

At MSK, care does not end after your treatment. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment.

This program has many services. We offer seminars, workshops, support groups, and counseling on life after treatment. We can also help with insurance and employment issues.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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