

cancer answers

Cancer Answers is a series of free public lectures, presented by *Cancer Care Nova Scotia*, on a variety of cancer-related topics. The lectures, delivered by cancer experts, are designed to raise awareness and educate participants about issues related to prevention, screening, early diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and palliative care.

Following each lecture, the presentations are posted on the *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* website @ www.cancercare.ns.ca



Cancer & Fear of Recurrence

D. McLeod Ph.D., R.N.

Capital Health Cancer Care Program

April 10, 2007

In my talk I will . . .

- Discuss what fear is and why it is so common with cancer
- Why some people struggle a lot with fear and others not so much
- What you can do to manage fear
- What family and friends can do to help
- When to seek professional help

Fear affects everyone who
experiences cancer . . .
whether you are the
person diagnosed or a
loved one.

Fear is one of the most common emotions in the face of cancer and . . . fear of recurrence is one of the most common fears.

Cancer . . .

- Constitutes a major threat
- Threat creates a cascade of stress effects on the body
- Stress hormones can contribute to anxiety and fear

Cancer also comes with loss . . .

- health
- security and the myth of a secure future
- identity, our body, self-esteem
- work, finances
- friends, usual activities
- and others . . .

Cancer treatments themselves may cause . . .

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Cognitive effects
- Difficulty sleeping
- And many other symptoms . . . all of which can contribute to fear and anxiety!



FEAR

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

**So if you feel fearful . . .
or anxious . . .**

You have good reason!

and . . .

You are not alone!

What exactly is “fear” ??

Etymologically meanings include:

- danger or peril
- ambush
- to try, risk, come over, go through
- to trial, attempt, experience

Ultimately, fear is tied
to loss and suffering

... and therefore goes hand in hand
with cancer!

But . . .

**not everyone experiences
fear the same way.**

Fear may be -

- Passing or fleeting
- More enduring but manageable
- Paralyzing, preventing normal day to day functioning, or
- All three from time to time

What makes the difference?

- Temperament . . . are you more inclined to be optimistic or pessimistic?
- Other stressors
- Support
- History of anxiety or depression
- Age
- Attitudes and experience with death

What can you do with
fear?

Strategies to manage fear:

1. Face your fear and make friends
2. Consider your beliefs
3. Pay attention to stress in general
4. Practice optimism
5. Explore your spiritual side
6. Create meaning
7. Draw on your family and friends
8. Laugh and play

**1. Face your fear . . .
and make friends!**



Becoming friends requires . . .

- Paying attention to what fear gets you thinking, feeling and doing
- Writing your thoughts down
- Noticing how and when fear sneaks up on you

- Noticing your good days . . . how do you keep fear in its place then?
- Developing gratitude for fear in your life.

2. Consider your beliefs

Recognize that beliefs are:

- often hidden
- changeable
- sometimes based on myth and assumption

What we believe is a
choice that gathers its
own evidence. Beliefs can
invite fear or standup to
fear.

3. Pay attention to stress in general

Signs of stress:

- Emotional or psychological
- Physical
- Behavioral

Managing stress requires good habits . . .

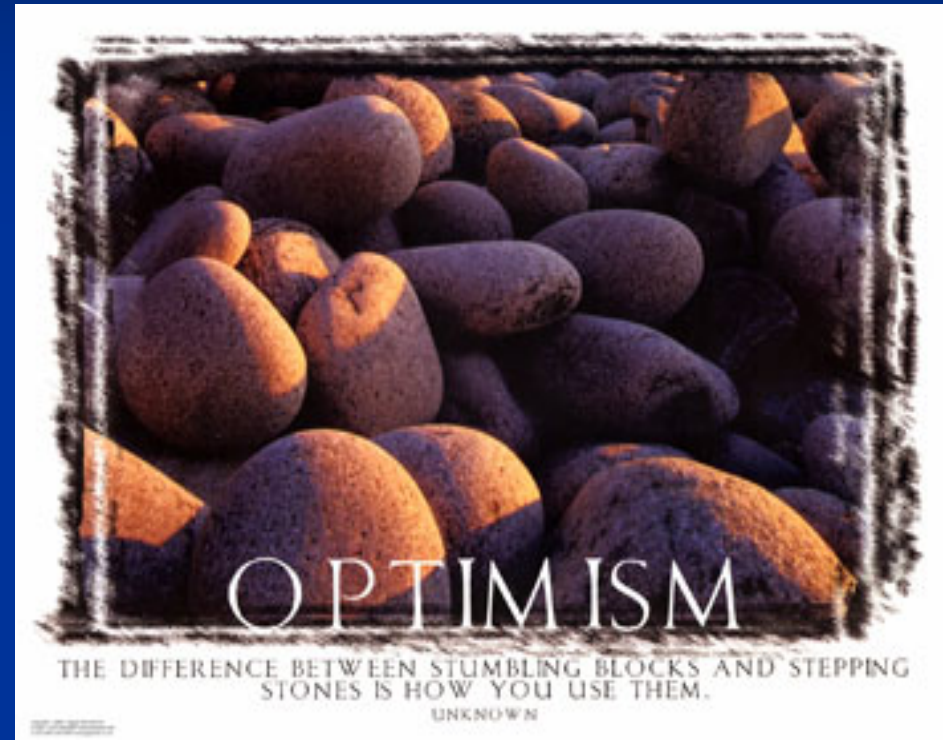
- Good nutrition, adequate sleep and fresh air
- Recognizing your own signals of increased stress
- Massage, reiki, therapeutic touch
- Enjoyable activities or hobbies

- A daily practice, for example –
 - Meditation, relaxation, prayer
 - Yoga, Tai chi
 - Exercise, walking



4. Practice optimism . . .

“the difference between
stumbling blocks and
stepping stones is how
you use them”



5. Explore your spiritual side

6. Create meaning

7. Draw on your family and friends



8. Laugh and play

Cautions . . .

- If none of these things help, and fear is interfering with day to day activities . . .
- If there are other concerning signs such as difficulty enjoying usual activities, feeling hopeless about the future . . .
- And these feelings persist more than a couple of weeks . . .
- Professional counselling can be very helpful . . . talk to your doctor, nurse or other health care professional!

What can family and friends do?

- Acknowledge your own fear
- Listen (and breathe!)
- Recognize that if your friend or family member is fearful, this is normal and understandable

What can family and friends do?

- Advice rarely helps
- Reminding the person of the “other side of the coin” and reasons for hope may be helpful . . . later.
- Ask what you can do or if what you have done is helpful

- **"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear"**

Ambrose Redmoon

