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Self-Management: Take Control of Your Health

Cancer is a complicated disease requiring specialized treatments and often involving a complex team of doctors and caregivers. Your personal journey with cancer and the challenges you have or will face along the way are unique. These challenges can be from the cancer, the side effects of treatments, making decisions about your treatment, dealing with treatment staff, and from the impact cancer has on your life. It can feel overwhelming. If you are feeling this way, you are not alone.

Your health care team has the knowledge and experience to help you. But keep reminding yourself that YOU are the expert on your own health. There are many active steps you can take to get the most out of your treatments and reduce the impact of side effects on your life. Using these steps to take back some of the control of your care and your life can go a long way toward improving your day-to-day life.

This kind of self-management may seem like a new idea, but you already do this every day, whether it's your choices for fitting exercise into your day or getting to bed on time. Taking control of your health by doing small things each day will add up to make a big difference in how you feel.

Here are some steps to help you improve your self-management skills:

5 steps for better self-management

Step 1: identify your goals

Step back and think about the sorts of things that are causing you the most problems. Is it a symptom of cancer? A side effect of treatment? Something happening in your life outside of cancer treatment? Choose 2-3 challenges you want to work on and then

identify the goals that will help you manage them. Make your goals specific. Think about where you want to be in a few weeks. For example, you may want to improve the quality of your sleep or you may want to eat better and exercise more to lessen the tiredness you've been having.

Step 2: create a plan

Now that you have goals to work on, think through where you want to start and what steps you want to take to achieve your goals. Each goal should have its own plan. Most goals will require more than one step to get to where you want to be. Start simple and build from there. For example, if you want to be more active, start with short walks or add 5 minutes to your exercise plan. Then increase that slowly until you get to your goal.

Step 3: identify potential challenges

No matter how solid a plan is, there will almost always be unexpected challenges that will make it harder to reach your goals. Think about what sorts of problems and potential challenges might throw you off track. Then make a strategy for how to overcome them. For example, if your goal is to exercise more and your plan is to take a 20-minute walk every day, how will you deal with bad weather? Maybe your solution to this challenge would be to go for a walk in a large indoor space, like at the mall.

Step 4: monitor your progress

Monitoring your progress helps you to see what is working well and where you might need to make a few changes. Even though this is a key step in getting more control over cancer's impact on your life, many of us forget to do this. Write down your goals and track your progress. When you get stuck, make a note and keep trying.. Try setting a consistent time during the day to check in with yourself and keeping track of your progress in a journal, chart, or on your calendar or phone.

Step 5: re-assess the plan

Look at what you have been tracking. How is it going? Ask yourself, what has worked well and what other steps might get you closer to your goal? Think about how you might want to change your plan or goals to keep moving forward. Talk to your health care team or your family and friends about your plans and your progress.

Taking back some of control of your life from cancer is not easy. Using these 5 steps, communicating with your health care team, and asking for support from the important

people in your life are all ways that can help you improve your health.

References

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