**Quality of Life and Cancer**

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I understand, first hand, as a cancer survivor the toll cancer takes on the mind and body. As a counselor specializing in chronic medical illness and oncology, I see the importance of quality of life. Everyday stress is normal, but distress can occur when people feel that they are unable to manage or control changes caused by cancer or even normal life activities. According to the National Cancer Institute, distress has become recognized as a factor that can reduce the quality of life of cancer patients and extreme distress is associated with poorer clinical outcomes. People diagnosed with cancer may find the physical, emotional, and social effects of the disease to be stressful. Negative psychological effects don’t even begin until after treatment ends for many cancer patients. Even if you feel out of control, there are ways you can take charge by focusing on areas of your life that you can control.

**How do I improve my quality of life during and after cancer treatment?**

**Express your feelings** by talking to family members or friends, cancer survivors, or a counselor.

**Relaxation techniques** such as meditation, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery have been shown to induce muscle relaxation, decrease anxiety and distress, and instill mental and emotional calm (Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine).

**Exercise** or gentle yoga has shown improvements in stress, fatigue, pain, sleep, emotional health, and vitality (Journal of Clinical Oncology). People with cancer can lead active lives even during treatment.

**Explore creative outlets** including making art, listening or playing music, photography, crafts, reading, and dance. Get on Pinterest and let your inner artist go wild!

**Spirituality and prayer** can offer guidance, peace, reflection, decreased loneliness, and hope.

**Focus on what you can control.** You cannot control that you have cancer but you can control what you do about it. Be involved in your health care, set a daily routine, fuel your body with nutritious food, focus on wellness not illness, and be kind to yourself. Allow yourself to have a bad day without feeling guilty.

**Social support** such as a cancer support group, mentor, family, and friends are so important to one’s quality of life. Isolation has been shown to increase the stress hormone norepinephrine, part of the body’s fight-or-flight response system, and may promote metastasis (National Cancer Institute). Grab a cup of coffee or oolong tea and allow others to be there for you!

Some expert organizations recommend that all cancer patients be screened for distress early in the course of treatment. A self-assessment distress questionnaire is attached to determine your potential need for additional support with a counselor.

**“Happiness is not something you postpone for the future; it is something you design for the present.”**

–Jim Rohn