

# Empower - Menopause and Cancer Survivorship Pathway

## Mood, Brain Fog, Anxiety & Stress Management

### Tips and Advice

#### Physical Activity

Engage in physical activity regularly. This can help with mood, brain fog, anxiety and stress management.

<https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-information/cancer-treatments-and-side-effects/coping-with-side-effects/managing-menopausal-symptoms>

#### Relaxation Techniques

1. Try relaxation or yoga classes (avoid hot yoga as it can induce hot flushes).  
<https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-information/cancer-treatments-and-side-effects/coping-with-side-effects/managing-menopausal-symptoms>
2. Put on music that you enjoy and close your eyes.
3. Relaxation Techniques:  
*Breathing to relax the body:* take slow deep breaths.  
*Body relaxation:* Tense and then relax each muscle group starting from the top of your body to the bottom: face, shoulders, arms, hands, abdomen, thighs, calves, feet.  
*Guided imagery:* close your eyes and picture a pleasant image. For instance, laying on the beach on a warm day  
<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/coping-with-treatment/complementary-therapies/mind-body-therapies>
4. Breathing Technique:  
Breathe in slowly, hold your breath for 5 seconds, exhale. Repeat this 5 times.  
Breathe normally for 30 seconds.  
Make an O shape with your mouth and breathe fast and hard for 10 seconds.  
Breathe normally for 30 seconds.  
Repeat this exercise 3 times in a row.  
<https://myprofile.thisisgo.ie/articles>
5. Meditation Technique:  
Get into a comfortable position such as lying down or sitting in a comfortable chair.  
Relax your shoulders and place your hands below your bellybutton.  
Breathe in for the count of 3 through your nose, hold for 1 second, breathe out from your mouth for the count of three. Feel your stomach rise up and down with your hands.  
For your inhale, picture calming air and during your exhale imagine releasing stress and tension.  
Do this at least 4-5 times.

6. Journaling can serve as an emotional release and/or an escape.

<https://myprofile.thisisgo.ie/articles/stress-management/>

Recommended journaling guidelines:

Write about thoughts and feelings. This can be helpful especially if someone has a hard time talking about their psychological symptoms with people.

If applicable, write down the helpful coping mechanisms you used when you were previously feeling down (i.e., meditation, exercising, talking to others, etc.) When you are feeling down again you can look back and see what helped.

- a. Track things that make you anxious or trigger anxious episodes. This can help you know what situations to avoid.

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/anxiety>

7. Release tension: punch a pillow, listen to music on a high volume, have a good cry.

### Help From Professionals

1. Contact your local cancer support centre or find a licensed counsellor who can provide talk therapy and/or cognitive behavioural therapy. Depending on the hospital you attend, you may be able to get counselling arranged – ask!
2. Seek out complementary therapies such as acupuncture, mindfulness, and reflexology (if you need guidance your GP can help you find resources).
3. Join a support group.
4. Talk to your doctor and medical team.  
<https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-information/cancer-treatments-and-side-effects/coping-with-side-effects/managing-menopausal-symptoms>
5. Find a clinical hypnosis service. Clinical hypnotists use hypnosis to help people enter a state of deep relaxation.  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/menopause-management>

### Anxiety Strategy:

- a. When you have an anxious thought, write it down. After you write your thought write down your behavioural reaction to it (i.e. eating a lot of food, avoiding certain situations)
- b. Once you have written these things down, look at your anxious thought and conduct a 'reality test.' Ask yourself *is it really a threat? What would I say to a close friend if they were in this situation? Have I managed similar situations before?* Write down your answers to these questions.
- c. Next, think about your behavioural response. Think of a productive activity that tends to calm you down and do it. For instance, going for a walk, reading a book, doing yoga or

talking to a friend. Write down an activity that helped you so you can look back and do it the next time you feel anxious.

d. Try to incorporate these activities into your daily life.

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/02-WHC-FACTSHEET-01-CBT-WOMEN-DEC2020.pdf>

*Low Mood Strategy:*

Strategy 1

- i. Take a step back and think about what you value about yourself and life in general.
- ii. Think about what you enjoy doing and what activities you value when you are not experiencing a low mood.
- iii. If you have stopped doing these activities as a result of your low mood, try doing them again. Doing these activities and trying to incorporate them into a daily routine can lift your mood.

Strategy 2 (for when one has negative thoughts about themselves)

- iv. Ask yourself if this view of yourself is really accurate.
- v. Ask yourself what a close family member or friend would say to you.
- vi. Ask yourself what evidence you have about these thoughts.

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/02-WHC-FACTSHEET-01-CBT-WOMEN-DEC2020.pdf>

## Miscellaneous

1. Stay busy. Find hobbies, be social if possible.
2. Eat a healthy diet.
3. Disclose to people you trust how you are feeling.
4. Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.

<https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-information/cancer-treatments-and-side-effects/coping-with-side-effects/managing-menopausal-symptoms>  
<https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-support/coping-with-cancer/information-for-survivors/healthy-living-after-cancer>

## Brain Fog

Specific tips for managing cancer related brain fog:

1. Keep a detailed list of tasks you need to complete including appointments, social gatherings, to-do lists, or even smaller things like books you want to read.
2. Complete important tasks during times when your mind is clear.
3. Exercise your brain: do crossword puzzles, try to learn a language, take a class, read an informational book.
4. Try to follow a regular daily schedule/routine.
5. Try to keep a spot in your home where you put important items like your keys and wallet.

<https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/changes-in-mood-or-thinking/chemo-brain.html>