

Managing Symptoms

Learning how to manage the symptoms of a serious illness can seem overwhelming. Whether the serious illness is a new diagnosis for you or if you have been living with your illness for some time, you may be experiencing a range of emotions and may be wondering how you will face the challenges having a serious illness brings. Learning about the emotional, physical and spiritual changes you may face and where you can turn to for support may help you enhance your quality of life and manage the symptoms of your serious illness.

Physical

Physical symptoms that you may experience include:

- Becoming tired more easily
- Having difficulty participating in your regular activities
- Having a renewed sense of energy as effects of previous treatment go away

Things you can do:

- Taking naps so that you have energy throughout the day
- Finding new activities that take less energy (for example if you like to cook, you may want to read some cookbooks and ask others to make the meals while you watch)
- Pace yourself as your energy returns after treatment and focus on those activities which give you the most joy or help you prepare for what is to come

Spiritual

Spiritual changes or feelings that you may experience include:

- A deeper sense of faith and hope for each day
- Questioning of your faith beliefs and what your life has meant
- A new understanding of spirituality that you did not have before

Things you can do:

- Exploring your faith through readings or discussions with family members, friends or faith leaders
- Reflecting on the role of faith throughout your life and ways in which you have found comfort in the past
- Talking with people who are or have been in a similar situation who may have advice for you

Emotional

Emotional changes that you may experience include:

- Fear – about what will happen as your illness progresses, or about the future of your loved ones
- Anger – about past treatment choices, about the change in diagnosis
- Grief – about the losses that you have had and those to come
- Anxiety – about making new decisions and facing new realities
- Disbelief – about the changes that will be taking place
- Relief – about ending difficult treatments and setting new goals for care

Things you can do:

- Sharing your feelings with friends, family members, healthcare professionals, faith leaders and others you respect
- Talking with people who are or have been in a similar situation who may have advice for you
- Writing about your feelings in a journal