



A Gynecologic Cancer fact sheet

psychosocial issues & survivorship: *your guide*

A cancer diagnosis can impact you in many ways beyond the actual staging and treatment of the disease. As you schedule appointments with your gynecologic oncologist, you might have questions about various topics related to your health. The Your Guide series, available on the Foundation for Women's Cancer website, is meant to be a patient resource that you can discuss with your health care provider. This fact sheet provides a description of psychosocial issues and what you can do to manage them.

Emotional and spiritual support, stress management:

Stress is a normal response to feeling threatened or to facing a challenge you're not sure you can meet. Receiving a cancer diagnosis is stressful! Stress can also creep into a survivor's life through the impact the treatment can have on mental health, social interactions and financial well-being. It is very common to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression during and following treatment for cancer, such as feeling sad, alone or fearful. These are examples of emotional stress. Everyone copes with these challenges differently, and we encourage you to ask your healthcare team for help, as you deserve to live a life of hope.

Stress can have an impact on the body even if you aren't noticing emotional symptoms. Studies suggest that stress impacts the body's ability to fight off disease, so it's important to address stress management as part of your treatment and plan for survivorship.

Some things that can help:

Mental health professionals: Social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists may all play a role in your care already and can be very helpful in identifying stress reduction techniques that work for you. Counseling is especially helpful to cope with feelings of emotional stress and counteract symptoms of anxiety and depression. If symptoms are severe, these professionals may help you understand if medications may be of benefit.

Support groups: It can be helpful to talk with and hear from women who share similar experiences as yours. Support from your peers may help you reduce stress and feel less alone. Talk with your healthcare team about support groups available to you in your community. There are also online support groups you may find useful.

Stress management: No one can just get rid of stress, but we can learn how to protect ourselves from the effects of stress. Some things you may find useful include counseling, mindfulness-based stress reduction, meditation or prayer. Studies have also shown that exercise and social engagement can improve our bodies' stress response.

Social engagement: Surround yourself with loved ones and stay engaged in the communities that are important and meaningful to you. Believe it or not, this will help you combat the effects of fatigue and stress from your cancer. If you are still in treatment, you may experience side effects that affect how you feel about joining in social events with friends and family. Your healthcare team may be able to adjust your treatment schedule to help you feel as well as possible for the life activities you don't want to miss, like weddings or graduations.

Financial stress management: A cancer diagnosis brings many changes to your life, not the least of which are costly treatments and a compromise to your ability to work. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) offers certain protections for workers and family members who must be away from work for health reasons, and we encourage you to talk with your employers about flexible plans to accommodate your needs. Your healthcare team may also be able to refer you to an adviser to help you understand your rights and prepare for the future. Visit the FWC website for more information about the financial stresses of cancer and how to alleviate them: [foundationforwomenscancer.org/gynecologic-cancers/financial-resources](https://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/gynecologic-cancers/financial-resources)

