

Mindfulness Meditation Helps Cancer Survivors Cope with Stress

Being more mindful can also help you remain physically active and stick to a healthy diet.

August 24, 2020 By Jessica Pieczynski

How Mindfulness Meditation Can Help Cancer Survivors Cope with Stress

It's possible that 2020 will go down in history as the year of Murphy's Law. The whole "what can go wrong, will go wrong" adage seems fitting for many as they navigate the economic, social and familial impact of the pandemic and cultural movements. Increased stress during these challenging times is the norm for even the healthiest among us.

For cancer survivors, however, the increased stress and complexities of safely accessing medical care can add additional strain to individuals who are already at risk for increased psychological distress following cancer treatment. If this year is compounding your stress or anxiety, the good news is there are plenty of coping strategies at your disposal, even if you are forced to stay at home.

One of the most accessible coping strategies during the pandemic is meditation, which can easily be practiced wherever you are and has garnered wide popularity across health care over the past couple of decades. Currently, mindfulness meditation is the most widely studied and utilized variation of meditation within medical settings. Mindfulness meditation is derived from Vipassana, the Theravada tradition of Buddhism and has been adapted into a secular format, allowing it to be a complementary approach to any religious or cultural background.

Mindfulness has been described as focusing attention on the present moment and adopting a stance marked by curiosity, openness and acceptance. In this form of meditation, participants are instructed to become aware of thoughts, feelings and sensations and to observe them in a nonjudgmental way. Contrary to common misconceptions, it is not aimed to stop thinking altogether or to block out unpleasantness in order to be relaxed – something that would be an impossible task for most people, especially cancer survivors. Instead, it is based on the philosophy that full and nonjudgmental experience of the present moment creates positive outcomes for wellbeing, even in the midst of health challenges.

Not surprisingly, there are a number of difficult aspects of the cancer experience that are well-suited for mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). The pervasive experience of a loss of control,

uncertainty and constant change are often the most challenging aspects of coping with cancer. Accepting things as they are, turning towards rather than away from difficult emotional experiences and embracing change as a constant can help in self-understanding and healing. Acknowledging these thoughts and feelings can also play a critical role in reducing overall stress and anxiety, thereby allowing people to live more fully in the present moment, regardless of the road ahead.

Mindfulness based interventions hold a great deal of promise for helping people with cancer cope across a broad range of symptoms and issues, both during and after the completion of active treatment. MBIs tailored specifically for individuals undergoing cancer treatment have demonstrated moderate to large improvements in stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue and sleep problems. Others have even noted small, but significant changes on salivary cortisol, cytokines and blood pressure. In one study, even brief MBIs have demonstrated short-term efficacy in reducing stress, behavioral symptoms and proinflammatory signaling in younger breast cancer survivors.

Clinical trials have consistently found MBIs to be very safe with few adverse outcomes. Sometimes people may experience a transient increase in anxiety as they learn to meditate.

Such interventions have also been offered via online platforms and have yielded positive results for participants. After all, attempting to let go of the usual busyness and distractions of daily life can be challenging as the mind settles or reveals unpleasant thoughts and feelings. But creating space for discomfort is the key to freeing oneself from getting stuck in unhelpful thinking patterns.

So, while you cannot change many of the challenges that 2020 brings, you can practice mindfulness meditation to help you better handle the stressors that life is throwing your way. Being more mindful can also help you remain physically active and stick to a healthy diet – all key ingredients for successfully navigating cancer survivorship!

Willing to give mindfulness meditation a try? Not sure if the app you downloaded is effective? We hear you – there isn't much in terms of research support for meditation apps yet, especially for cancer survivors. Here are some online resources you can try from reputable institutions that offer evidence-based approaches:

[UCSD Center for Mindfulness](#) – In addition to their library of free guided meditations, due to the pandemic the Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion, and the Compassion Institute are offering daily streams and recordings of mindfulness and compassion sessions to provide online support.

[The Mindfulness Center at Brown University](#) – This clinical research and training hub also offers online Mindfulness Base Stress Reduction Classes and free community classes in response to the pandemic.

And don't forget about your other important coping strategies for staying healthy! AICR's [iTHRIVE](#) program is an excellent resource designed for survivors by survivors that includes

diet, physical activity, rejuvenation, spirit and environmental tips to address stress reduction.

[This article](#) was originally released on August 19, 2020, by the American Institute for Cancer Research. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/mindfulness-meditation-can-help-cancer-survivors-cope-stress>