

Cancer and Stress

Great advances have been made in the treatment of cancers over the years so that many cancers are treatable nowadays. But, having it is a stigma for many people. The fear of getting cancer often causes stress.

A major concern of cancer patients is the treatment's side effects. The side effects from chemotherapy or radiotherapy renders some patients unable to work, causing additional stress for them if their income is affected. Furthermore, some treatments are expensive.

Cancer-related stress can induce psychological and behavioural changes, such as loss of confidence and social withdrawal which, in turn, may affect the patient's relationship with his or her family and friends.

Proper stress management is, therefore, important during treatment as well as during the recovery period. Stress may also affect the immune system by turning abnormal cells into cancerous ones. Inability to deal with the disease-related stress can also affect the patient's treatment.

Worrying about relapses is stressful. Studies show the recurrence rate of patients suffering from stress is higher than that of patients who can deal with their stress.

Patients, their carers and health-care professionals should work together to combat cancer-related stress. Patients should tell their doctors about their concerns, learn more about the disease and its treatment by asking questions. Talking to family members or friends is also a good way to relieve stress. Carers should give moral support to patients and should encourage them to take part in healthy social activities. Support from self-help groups also helps.