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Stress Reducers

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Ten science-based stress reducers to help manage post-treatment stress.

Here are 10 science-based stress reducers to help manage post-treatment stress, provided by Barbara L. Andersen, PhD, of Ohio State University's Department of Psychology and the OSU Comprehensive Cancer Center-James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute.

1. Understand stress and your responses to it. Recognize cancer stressors and try to identify the physical changes it may produce for you, such as headaches, heart pounding, and abnormal breathing. Emotional tolls may manifest as fatigue, difficulty making decisions, or anxiety.

2. Learn how to relax. Progressive muscle relaxation lowers tension and reduces wear and tear on the body. Relaxation can help control cancer therapy symptoms, such as nausea and fatigue. Practice at least three times per week for 20-minute sessions. Learn to relax through other methods, including meditation, yoga, massage, and/or deep breathing.

3. Resolve to problem solve. Define and target your problem. Generate and implement solutions and evaluate the result.

4. Identify a social support network. Share your reactions to the cancer crisis and adapt coping techniques. Accept the spontaneous offers of help from friends and family. Seek out help through online support and cancer message boards.

5. Communicate how stress is affecting you. Express your thoughts, feelings, and needs for help to your health care providers, support groups, friends, and family.

6. Focus on nutrition. Eat less fat and more fiber. Fuel up with fruits, vegetables, and proteins. If appetite loss is a problem, eat smaller meals and eat more frequently.

7. Get plenty of sleep. Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep to encourage health and well-being. Even with adequate sleep, however, individuals can experience cancer-related fatigue.

8. Start or resume an exercise -regime. Increase your activity level. Gentle exercise, such as walking or swimming, can help relieve tense muscles and improves mood. Consult with your physician to affirm your readiness for exercise. Start with a small achievable goal, such as 10 minutes a day, and slowly increase as endurance improves. Exercising with a friend often can help to

maintain your own interest and motivation.

9 . Learn to manage physical and mental health symptoms. Call your doctor, when necessary, or come to your appointments with questions. Comply with follow-up visits and medical advice. Seek professional psychological help if needed.

10 . Make time and care for yourself. Treat yourself to something you enjoy. Easy-to-do, simple pleasures are often the best, such as reading a good book, listening to music, going to a movie, taking a walk, or talking with a trusted friend.