



Living Well With Cancer **A Mindful Approach**

*Discover mindfulness and relaxation practices to reduce stress, anxiety
and symptoms for cancer patients, caregivers and healthcare providers.*

The heart and science of medicine.

— THE —
University of Vermont
CANCER CENTER

*It is not the stressors in our lives,
but how we respond to them that
matters in finding ways to improve
our outlook and resiliency when
facing cancer.*

Mindfulness and relaxation tools are known to reduce stress and anxiety, relieve symptoms and encourage wellbeing for patients, survivors and caregivers affected by cancer. The University of Vermont Cancer Center offers this booklet as well as other resources that can support your healing and wellness.

In this booklet, you will discover:

- Mindfulness meditation practices to relieve stress
- Relaxation techniques to foster wellbeing
- Resources to help you cope with the difficulty of illness.



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Benefits of Mindfulness and Relaxation Tools

Mindfulness practices and the relaxation response helps us:

- Stay more focused
- Realize the importance of being flexible to life's changes
- Develop compassion for ourselves and others
- Cope with life's challenges including but not limited to cancer



Mindfulness and Relaxation skills are known to help cancer patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers reduce stress and anxiety, support the immune system, reduce pain and other symptoms, and improve the quality of life. For healthcare providers, these tools can reduce burnout and improve retention.

If we pay attention, we can learn to make healthy choices in our lives. Practicing mindfulness and relaxation helps decrease the chronic “Fight or Flight” stress reactions in our bodies and encourages the “Relaxation Response.” This can help the immune system to support healing and well being. It encourages us to live with “what is” rather than “what if.”

- Mindfulness practices help us be more present and accepting in our lives.
- Relaxation tools help us lower stress so we feel calmer and can cope with challenges.
- Both mindfulness and relaxation can help us make healthy decisions.

Acceptance is not giving up, but finding ways to change habits that don't work for us anymore.

What is Mindfulness and Mindfulness Practices?

Mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment with a non-judgmental attitude.

Try the following practices on your own.

AWARENESS OF BREATH

- Be aware of your breath, noticing your in-breath and out-breath without changing it. Use the breath to be present to each moment of your life.
- Practice sitting quietly with the breath for a few minutes or longer.
- Be aware of the breath during stressful times or even pleasant moments.

BRIEF BODY SCAN

- Start with noticing your breath coming in and out.
- Scan through your body noticing your feet, legs, pelvic area, back, abdomen, chest, arms, neck, head and face.
- Bring awareness to areas of discomfort without trying to change them.
- Stay with the areas of discomfort while noticing your breath.
- Pay attention to the breath through your whole body.

MINDFUL EATING

- Eat a snack or meal mindfully—without doing anything else at the time.
- Take a drink of coffee, tea or water. Pause, breathe and take another drink.
- Use your senses to notice and appreciate what you are eating or drinking.

MINDFUL WALKING

- Notice your steps as you walk from one place to another.
- Choose a small area and practice walking with no place to go.

MINDFULNESS VIDEOS—LISTEN TO THESE TWO VIDEOS

UVMHealth.org/CancerCenter/MindfulnessVideo

UVMHealth.org/CancerCenter/MeditationVideo

Relaxation Response Tools

The relaxation response results when we are able to lower our stress. Relaxation tools help decrease our body's response to the stressors in our lives.

Open your mind to the relaxation experience.

FIND A QUIET ENVIRONMENT IF POSSIBLE

- If you are in a noisy environment, notice sounds, then your breath or body.
- Take three slow, deep breaths to activate a receptive state of mind.
- If your mind wanders, re-focus it back to the relaxation.

OPEN YOUR MIND TO THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

- Consciously, cultivate a non-reactive attitude. Watch your thoughts. You can watch them as if they were clouds floating by, then return to the breath.
- Avoid “trying to make yourself” relax. Allow your body to relax naturally. Learning to relax takes time.

CHOOSE AN OBJECT TO PLACE YOUR ATTENTION

- This can be the breath, the body, or even thoughts and emotions.
- You can repeat a word or words (sometimes called a “mantra”) like “thinking,” “peace,” “healing,” or simply say “in” and “out” with each breath.
- Paying attention to sounds can be helpful in practicing relaxation.

MAKE TIME TO PRACTICE

- Establish a routine once or twice a day . Find the “right” time for you, in the morning or evening, even at work, to take time for relaxation.
- Choose music if you wish to accompany your relaxation time or practice outdoors while sitting or walking.
- Be aware of your body and mind when you first wake up or before falling asleep. This can be a quiet time to practice.

Mini-Breathing Practices to relieve stress & fatigue

Try a mini-breathing practice several times to see which is best for you.

COUNTDOWN BREATHING

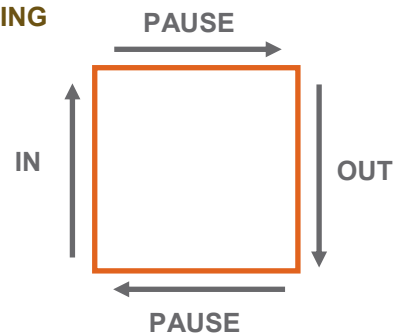
- Start with deep breathing with even in breaths and out breaths.
- Count down from 10 to 1 using one count for each inhale and exhale.

RIDING THE WAVE

- Visualize a waveform that rises and falls with each inhale and exhale.
- Count slowly 1 to 4 to four as you inhale and slowly from 4 to 1 as you exhale.

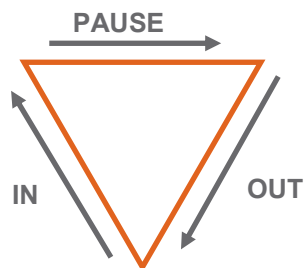
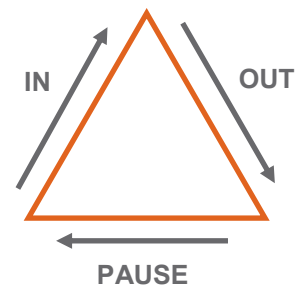
SQUARE (OR RECTANGULAR) BREATHING

- After each in breath and out breath, pause for the same amount of time, or if that's difficult, pause for half the time.
- Notice your breath in times of stillness, both after the inhale and exhale.

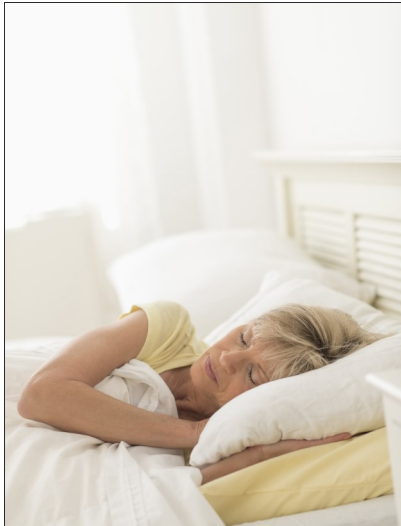


TRIANGLE BREATHING FOR RELAXING OR FATIGUE

- RELAXING (use for calming and quieting): Inhale for a count of four or less, then exhale immediately for the same count. Then hold for 2–4 counts.



- INVIGORATING (use to bring energy to the body when you feel tired): Inhale for a count of four or less, then pause for 2-4 counts and exhale for four or less, then inhale immediately.



Sleep Quality

IMPROVING YOUR SLEEP HABITS

Many adults are not getting the sleep they need and sleep difficulty is often associated with stress. Cancer patients may complain of insomnia that interferes with their sleep. We all worry to a certain extent but when it becomes chronic, it may affect our health and well being. Here are some guidelines for habits known to help improve sleep quality:

1. Try to go to bed at the same time each day to help your body develop a sleep-wake schedule. If possible, go to bed at the same time on weekends as you do during the week.
2. Food and some drink can affect sleep. Do not drink coffee or soda with caffeine in the afternoon or evening. Avoid large meals or alcohol before bedtime. Nicotine can also disturb sleep.
3. A restful environment helps improve sleep quality. This means not looking at the screens on devices, even TV, too close to bedtime. Try to not look at screens 30—60 minutes before bedtime.
4. Naps may be helpful but long naps may interfere with nighttime sleep. You may need more naps while in treatment or healing.
5. Exercise is known to help with sleep but it is better to exercise during the day and not right before bedtime.
6. Stress reduction through meditation or relaxation is known to help.

Check with your healthcare provider if you are having chronic sleep difficulties. You may have a condition that requires medical treatment.

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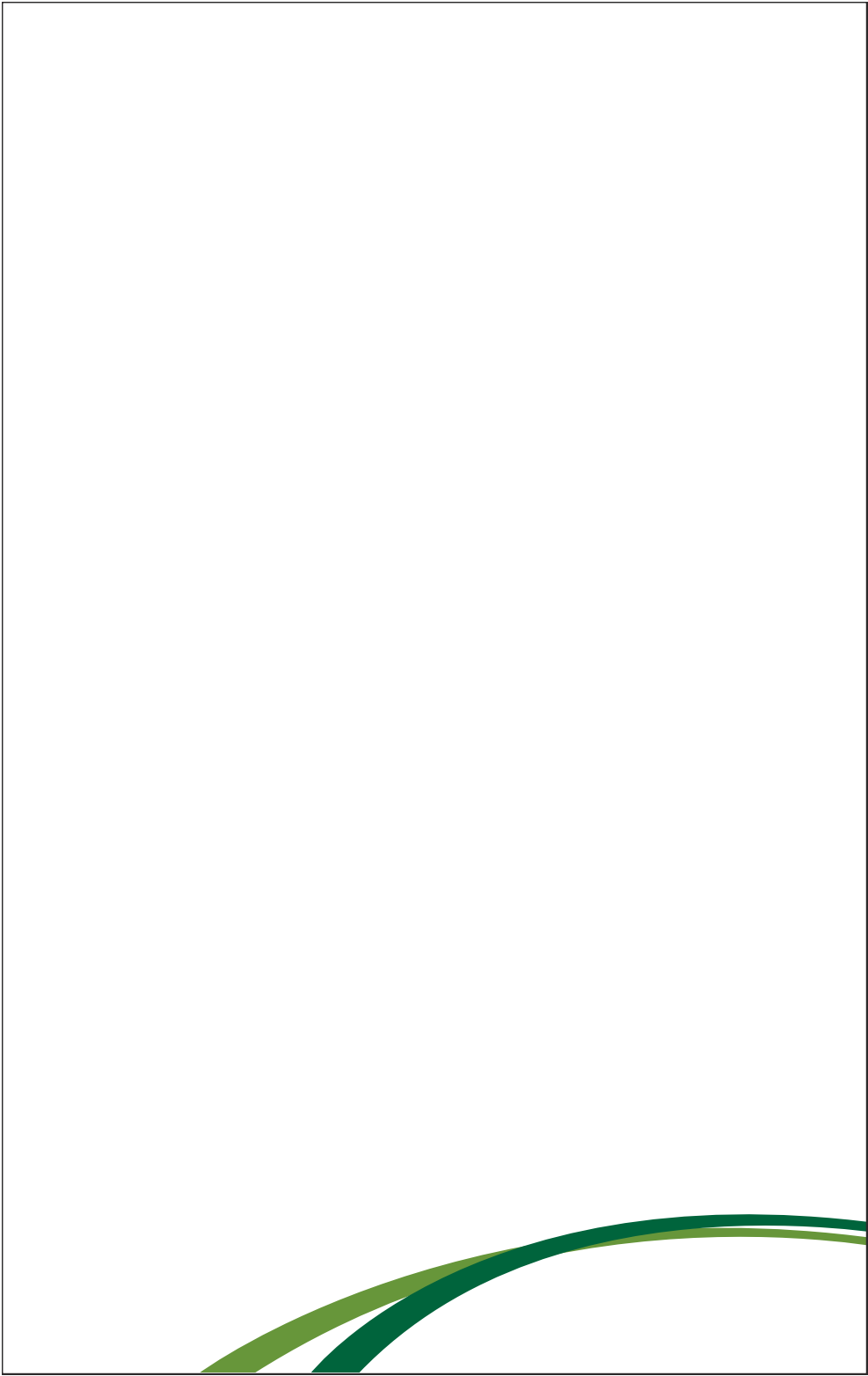
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University of Vermont Cancer Center Resources

- Steps to Wellness
- Mental health counselors
- Social Workers
- Mindfulness classes and groups
- Mindfulness videos
- Yoga
- Massage and reiki
- Healing art and writing
- Frymoyer Community Health Resource Center
- Cancer support groups



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find more information about these resources, contact:

The University of Vermont Cancer Center
(802) 847-8400

Integrative Therapies

Webpages:

Integrative Health at the UVM Cancer Center
www.uvmhealth.org/cancercenter/integrativetherapies

UVM Integrative Health
www.uvm.edu/ih

or

Speak with your provider to find out about
these integrative support services.



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