

Cancer Care Companion

Thriving at Home During the COVID Outbreak



Finding Joy During Uncertainty

Issue 102

Music legend Bob Marley once wrote, “You never know how strong you are until strong is your only choice,” and, for many people, this sentiment rings true now more than ever before.

This is a frightening time. We’re in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. Many people have been directly impacted; others are bracing for what is still to come. Everyone of us swirling in a tsunami of uncertainty and wondering, “What is going to happen next?”

At its core, uncertainty makes it difficult for us to prepare for and reduce the negative impact of a potential future event, and this loss of control creates anxiety.¹ Without knowing how we might be impacted or how bad things will get, spiraling into overwhelming dread and panic becomes all too easy.

Unfortunately, for anyone touched by cancer — especially, metastatic cancer — this “fear of the unknown” is all too familiar. Cancer and uncertainty go hand in hand. Upon hearing the words “You have cancer,” we often lose our footing. Our confidence in

moving forward with life plans vanishes. Known reference points in our lives disappear. The normalcy we took for granted only yesterday evaporates in an instant. But with resiliency and courage born of necessity, the majority of cancer patients bravely press on in the face of this uncertainty by summoning courage they never knew they had and by assembling tools and support to manage their uncertainty-fueled stress, anxiety and fear.

There are strong parallels between the emotions brought on by pandemic uncertainty and the emotions experienced during a metastatic cancer journey; likewise, the mechanisms for successfully coping with each are also similar. What researchers and therapists know is that de-escalating stress starts with our ability to self-regulate and, when it comes to self-regulating, nothing is more important than breath and movement.^{2,3} Without these two vital actions, stress accumulates in our bodies. *(continued on page 2)*

Recipe White Bean Stew with Rosemary, Spinach, and Parmesan

This hearty vegetarian stew is ready in just 30 minutes and full of nutrients. The white beans and veggies provide calcium, magnesium, potassium and vitamin K to support bone health, plus a healthy dose of fiber, protein, and iron.¹² *(Recipe on page 3)*

Bone Health Exercise Reverse Lunge

Strengthen your upper legs, knees, and glutes with this weight bearing reverse lunge. (Versions of this exercise are similar to “warrior pose in yoga.”) Doing a challenging movement like a reverse lunge puts weight on your hip bones and helps them stay strong.¹¹ No equipment is needed. *(Exercise on page 2)*

(continued from page 1)

A growing body of research suggests potential benefits of practices such as meditation and yoga to reduce distress and anxiety (and to alleviate fatigue and improve sleep and quality of life) during cancer treatment.⁴ Although we are still studying why these practices work, we do know that directing attention to present-moment bodily sensations, such as breath, can help curtail our wandering minds, which is one of the hallmarks of anxiety.

Our ability to self-regulate also starts with expanding our vocabulary — either through self-reflection or with the help of a trained professional — to more accurately articulate and express what we are feeling. When “feeling stressed,” for example, is further broken down into emotions such as helplessness, shame, irritation, anger, confusion, disconnect, conflict, loneliness, sadness, or fear, we gain a more precise understanding of our true feelings. This helps us better understand the origin of the discomfort, which then allows for more constructive conversations and solutions.

Prior to my son's cancer diagnosis, I learned Vipassana meditation. That practice saved me during his treatment and recovery. It allowed me to go inside, listen to my breath, and nurture myself. This pandemic has cracked my PTSD wide open. I have found my twice-a-day meditation practice a comforting and reliable partner during these stressful times.
--Desanne, Mill Valley, CA



Beyond breath, movement and expanded vocabulary, other proven ways to cope with unpleasant feelings include:

- Music⁵
- Psychotherapy⁶
- Art and other creative activities⁷
- Exposure to nature⁸
- Gardening⁹
- Socializing with others¹⁰

By engaging in these activities, we are able to reclaim moments of joy, experience greater mental calm, and shape a new normal for ourselves despite the challenges life presents.

Bone Health Exercise

Reverse Lunge

(continued from page 1)

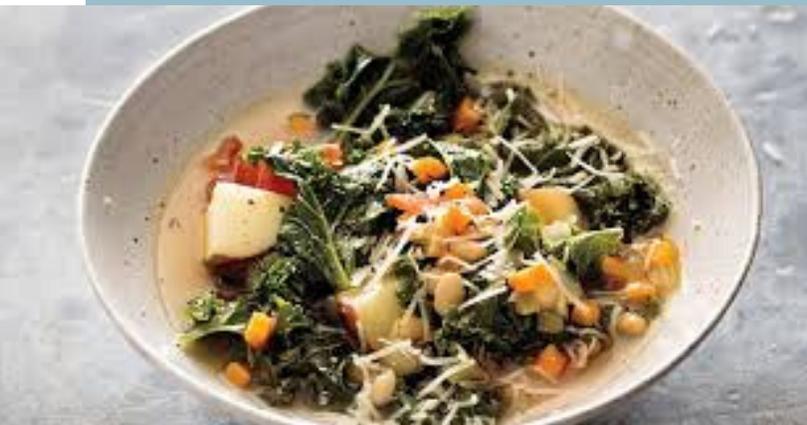
Strengthen your upper legs, knees, and glutes with this weight bearing exercise. Doing this challenging movement puts weight on your hip bones and helps them stay strong.¹¹

- Begin with feet together, hands on hips, eyes looking forward, and chest lifted.
- Step back with one foot as you bend both knees and lower the back knee toward the floor for a count of three.
- Keep the chest lifted and try not to bend forward at the waist.
- Return to standing by pressing through the heel of your front foot. You should feel the muscles on the back side of your front leg and your butt (hamstrings and glutes).
- Repeat the reverse lunge on the same leg 10 times. Switch to the other leg.
- Lunge on both sides for a total of two sets per side of 10 repetitions each.
- Keep track of your sets and repetitions.

Modification: If you have trouble with balance, hold on to the back of a chair or countertop with one hand.

Visit www.Thrivors.com for more research-based exercises for cancer survivors.





Recipe

White Bean Stew with Rosemary, Spinach and Parmesan

This hearty vegetarian stew is ready in just 30 minutes and full of nutrients. The white beans and veggies provide calcium, magnesium, potassium and vitamin K to support bone health, plus a healthy dose of fiber, protein and iron.¹²

Makes 6 Servings

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 4 carrots, halved and sliced into ½ inch pieces
- 2 ribs celery, halved lengthwise and sliced into ¼ inch pieces
- 3 15-ounce cans low-sodium white beans, drained and rinsed
- 3 cups filtered water
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 6 cups fresh spinach leaves
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese

Directions

1. In a large pot, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook 5-6 minutes, stirring often, until onion begins to soften. Add the garlic, carrots, and celery and continue to cook, 6 minutes more, stirring occasionally.
2. Add 3 cups of water, the beans, rosemary, salt, black pepper and red pepper flakes. Heat to boil and then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer uncovered for 12-15 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.
3. Remove from heat and stir in the spinach leaves, which will quickly wilt.
4. Divide among six bowls, sprinkle 1 tablespoon parmesan cheese over each bowl and serve.

Nutrition information per serving

Serving size 1.5 cups; Calories 419; Total Fat 9g; Saturated Fat 2g; Carbohydrates 40g; Fiber 25g; Protein 21g; Sodium 210mg; Calcium 278mg.

The information in this newsletter is provided as an educational resource. Before undertaking any physical activity or exercise program you should consult with your physician and healthcare team.

References: 1. Grupe DW, Nitschke JB. Uncertainty and anticipation in anxiety: an integrated neurobiological and psychological perspective. *Nat Rev Neurosci*. 2013;14(7):488-501. doi:10.1038/nrn3524. 2. Jerath R, Braun M, Barnes V, Harden K. Self-regulation of breathing as a primary treatment for anxiety. *Applied psychophysiology and biofeedback*. 2015; 40. 10.1007/s10484-015-9279-8. 3. ADAA. Exercise for Stress and Anxiety. Anxiety and Depression Association of America.2020.<https://adaa.org>. 4. Heeter C, Lehto R. Benefits of Yoga and Meditation for Patients with Cancer. *Onco Nursing News*. 2018; www.oncnursingnews.com. 5. Heshmat S. Seven effective ways to regulate emotion with music. *Psychology Today*. 2019. www.psychologytoday.com. 6. Hollon SD, Ponniah K. A review of empirically supported psychological therapies for mood disorders in adults. *Depress Anxiety*. 2010;27(10):891-932. doi:10.1002/da.20741. 7. Fancourt D, Garnett C, Spiro N, West R, Müllensiefen D. How do artistic creative activities regulate our emotions? Validation of the Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities Scale (ERS-ACA). *PLoS One*. 2019;14(2):e0211362. Published 2019 Feb 5. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0211362. 8. Emami E, Amini R, Motalebi G. The effect of nature as positive distractibility on the Healing Process of Patients with cancer in therapeutic settings. *Complement Ther Clin Pract*. 2018;32:70-73. doi:10.1016/j.ctcp.2018.05.005. 9. Soga M, Gaston KJ, Yamaura Y. Gardening is beneficial for health: A meta-analysis. *Prev Med Rep*. 2016;5:92-99. Published 2016 Nov 14. doi:10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.007. 10. Witowska J, Schmidt S, Wittmann M. What happens while waiting? How self-regulation affects boredom and subjective time during a real waiting situation. *Acta Psychologica*. Volume 205. 2020. 103061. ISSN 0001-6918. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2020.103061>. 11. Winters-Stone KM, Dobek J, Bennett JA, Nail LM, Leo MC, Schwartz A. The effect of resistance training on muscle strength and physical function in older, postmenopausal breast cancer survivors: a randomized controlled trial. *J Cancer Surviv*. 2012;6(2):189-199. doi:10.1007/s11764-011-0210-x. 12. Dietary Guidelines. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition.