Fear of Recurrence

All cancer patients have to learn to live with some amount of fear of cancer recurrence (FCR)

- 39-97% “Some” FCR
- 22-87% “Moderate” FCR
- 1-15% “High” FCR
Family and Friends Worry Too

Especially if the patient has a high FCR and when other stressors are present
Completion of Treatment often does not bring the sense of relief you would expect:

- Figuring out the “new normal”
- Abrupt disconnection from treatment team
- Loss of practical and emotional support
- Lack of clarity about the goals of follow-up
- Sense of isolation from those around you who are moving past it
Consequences of FCR

- Worse Quality of Life
- Greater distress and anxiety
- Intrusive preoccupation with the illness
- Not establishing future goals and plans
Worry, Fear, and Anxiety

- Normal human emotions
- Emergency response system
- Pushes us to take action
- Can’t live here
What are your personal vulnerabilities for high FCR?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous losses in life</td>
<td>Past traumatic life experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of reliable information relevant to actual risk of recurrence</td>
<td>Current caring roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous history of anxiety or worry</td>
<td>Other psychosocial stressors (such as financial hardship, marital problems)</td>
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Challenge your beliefs about worry
Metacognitions: Thoughts about Thoughts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unhelpful beliefs about the importance, impact, and control of worry</th>
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<tr>
<td>“If I worry about cancer coming back, I will be prepared for it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“All this worry is going to make the cancer come back.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superstitious beliefs about worry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inaccurate beliefs that worry is protective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not worrying will make a bad thing happen</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I must worry in order to cope”</td>
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</table>
What are your unhelpful or inaccurate beliefs about worry?
Beginning to shift away from worry

Getting Clear on your values:
What are the most important things in your life?

How is the worry interfering with living your values?
2 Practices for Attention Training

MUNDANE TASK FOCUSING

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION
Mundane Task Focusing

Write down 3 mundane tasks you do everyday

Record when/where you do the tasks

When doing the task, focus completely on every aspect of the task

When your mind wanders away, gently bring it back to the experience of the task

Focus on 5 senses: Touch, Sight, Hearing, Smell, Taste
Mindfulness Meditation

What am I experiencing right now? Acknowledge without trying to change it.

Bring attention to the breath. Focus on sensation of breathing: I breathe in and I breathe out.

When the mind wanders away, acknowledge the thought and then come back to your breath: I breathe in and I breathe out.

10 minutes a day, every day.
Movement Therapies have been shown to reduce overall levels of FCR

TAI CHI

YOGA
Other physical activity has been shown to reduce effects of worry and stress.

EXERCISE

WALKING IN NATURE
Managing the physical effects of worry
Worry Postponement

- Set aside a time for worry
- Try to postpone your worry until your designated time
- Give yourself 10-15 minutes to do nothing but worry, every day
- During your designated time, worry as hard as you can
- At least 2 hours before bedtime
Cognitive Attentional Syndrome

- An attentional bias towards threat related information
- Dealt with by excessive checking for further threat
- Oversensitivity to danger cues related to cancer
- Chains of verbal thoughts in the form of worry and rumination
- Extends negative thinking instead of terminating it
Threat Monitoring

- Learning which symptoms to worry about and which to not worry about
- Self-exam practices
- Medical surveillance
- Avoidant behaviors
- Excessive behaviors
- The more you look for cancer, the more anxious you get about cancer
- Overestimation of risk
Talk to your doctor about appropriate self monitoring practices
What are your worry triggers?

- Know what triggers your worry and have a plan
- Having a plan or strategy is a worry-buster
- Having to think on our feet causes more worry
- Have a “script” that you use, especially for acquaintances
The Power of Positive Thought

- Being optimistic is associated with increased energy
- Positivity releases “feel good” hormones and neurotransmitters
- Optimism is associated with perceived sense of well being
- It is NOT dangerous to have negative thoughts
The Relaxation Response
The Relaxation Response

- Lowers heart rate, BP, oxygen consumption
- Counteracts effects of stress on the body
- Repetitive activities like playing an instrument, yoga, knitting, walking
- Prayer (especially repetitive), mantra paired with quiet time
- Breathing exercises (4-7-8 breathing, forced yawns)
- Less static/noise/chatter in your head
Social Support

- Social isolation makes worry and fear worse
- Many don’t talk about it for fear of appearing “crazy”
- Support groups have been shown to be helpful in managing fear of recurrence
- Some fear support groups will be depressing or increase worry
### When to get professional help

- Distress that persists and doesn’t fluctuate
- Past emotional problem that is getting worse
- Overwhelming fear, panic attacks, or developing new phobias
- Continual avoidance of aspects of life/work/relationships
When to get professional help

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<td>Severe depressive thoughts/hopelessness/little joy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others are worried about you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical symptoms unrelated to the illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>You think you aren’t coping well</td>
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