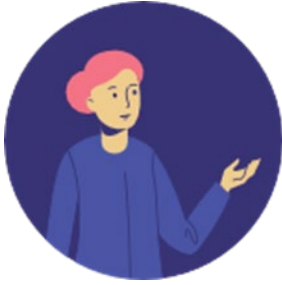


Wellbeing



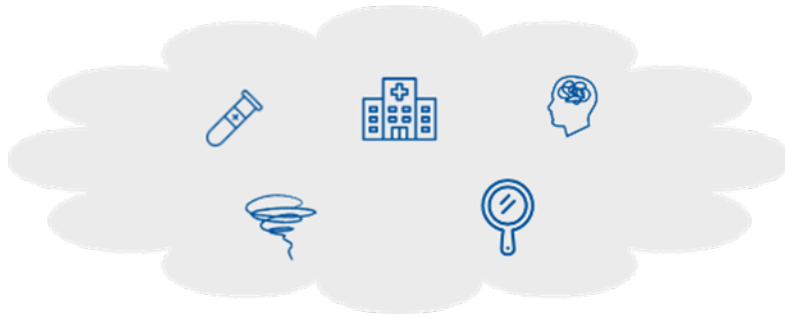
“ I see changes in myself in that I’m more aware of things. There’s a bit more equilibrium. I learned that I’m a strong person.”

Julie
Diagnosed with breast cancer

What is cancer-related wellbeing?

Wellbeing is the ability to enjoy life and the capacity to deal with life’s challenges. It is a positive sense of self that involves your body, mind, and emotions. When you are in a state of wellbeing, you have the energy and motivation to live your life and interact with the world. It does not mean you must feel happy all the time. It is always possible to experience well-being even if you live with a mental health condition.

- **How does it affect me?** It is normal to feel overwhelmed when you face a challenge such as a cancer diagnosis and its treatment. Your state of mind may not leave space for a feeling of wellbeing. You suddenly have a much longer to-do list, which includes visits to the doctor and treatment schedules. You may feel that you have no control over your thoughts and emotions. At times like these, keep in mind that your current feelings can and will change.
- **Does it get better?** In the early days and weeks after the diagnosis, it makes sense to focus on your treatment and recovery. But as time goes on, a focus on wellbeing can help you live your best life during and after treatment ends. In fact, wellbeing is one of the most powerful tools for coping with cancer.



What are the causes of low wellbeing?

Here are some, but not all, of the things that may be impacting your wellbeing:

- Worry about your cancer diagnosis and test results
- Side effects from cancer treatments like nausea, fatigue, lack of appetite
- The number of hospital visits for tests and treatments
- Changes to your body image from your cancer or side effects of treatment
- Inability to do the activities you once enjoyed because of treatment side effects
- Feeling overwhelmed by all that your cancer represents



What are the signs of low wellbeing?

Feelings of shock, anger and isolation are not unusual during cancer treatment. If you feel “stuck” in this mindset, however, it may be the time to take steps to change this (see section [What can I do to improve my wellbeing?](#)). Here are some signs that your wellbeing is low:

- Anxiety and stress dominate your day-to-day life
- You feel angry about your cancer
- You feel like you are on an emotional roller-coaster

- You do not want to see people you know or meet new people
- You are embarrassed about how cancer or its treatment has changed your body
- You avoid sexual intimacy
- You feel ashamed for having cancer
- You cannot accept yourself the way you are
- You have finished cancer treatment but still feel tired and unmotivated



When should I get help to improve my wellbeing?

There is nothing unusual or embarrassing about feeling “stuck,” and professional help is available. If any of the following are true for you, talk to your oncologist, your nurse, or your pivot nurse at your next appointment. (For more information see [Talking to your healthcare professional about your symptoms or concerns](#)):

- You struggle to manage your anxiety
- You feel your emotions are out of control
- You cannot accept the way you look from the treatments or its side effects
- You feel that you have no motivation
- You stay away from social interaction with family or friends
- You have trouble sleeping
- You think you may be depressed



Talk to someone in your healthcare team immediately if:

- You are having thoughts about harming or killing yourself. If you can't reach someone in your healthcare team, call Suicide Action Montreal at 1-866-277-3553.

What can I do to help manage my wellbeing?

Wellbeing is not something that magically appears or disappears. You can see wellbeing as a result of actions you take to help you feel better. Think of it as a wellness plan—a set of actions you take to feel your best. The strategies offered below can help you get started on a balanced wellness plan to meet your physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs. If you need extra help, don't hesitate to talk to a member of your healthcare team.



Keep a symptom diary

This can help you and your healthcare team understand your wellbeing and find ways to help.

- Keep a record of your daily physical activities – such as walking, gardening, household chores, and taking stairs instead of elevators.
- Keep a record of the times you feel anxious or stressed. Can you describe what triggered it?
- Write down any problems that you are facing. Can you describe strategies to address it?
- Keep a record of your eating patterns. Are you skipping meals? Are you eating well?
- Write down what time you go to bed and when you get up in the morning. Are you getting enough sleep?
- For more information see [Symptom Diary](#).



Eat well

Healthy eating promotes a sense of wellbeing, but may seem like a lot of work when facing cancer treatment. Eating well can help you feel better and keep your body strong. These tips will help you keep it simple and manageable:

- Worry less over small details: aim for a balanced mix of nutritious foods, using [Canada's Food Guide](#) to help you plan meals.
- Have your groceries or healthy meals delivered to your home to make healthy eating easier.
- If you do not have the appetite for three meals, eat healthy snacks throughout the day.
- Keep trying to eat foods you used to enjoy, even if you don't have an appetite for them now. They may start tasting good again in a few days or weeks.
- If you feel you need help with healthy eating, ask a dietitian to help you choose a meal plan that works for you. Your healthcare team can refer you to one.
- For more information see [Looking After Yourself](#).



Move your body

All experts agree: moving your body makes you feel better, possibly because it releases endorphins (chemical messengers in the brain) that lift your mood. It also distracts you from worries that interfere with wellbeing. Keep the following in mind as you start moving:

- It is generally fine to exercise during treatment, but check with your healthcare team before starting any exercise.
- Accept that your body may have new limits, at least for the time being.
- Choose an activity you enjoy. It doesn't need to be the gym: you can get health benefits from gardening, brisk walking, or any form of movement you can manage.
- Gradually increase the time you spend moving to avoid injury from overdoing it.
- Aim to exercise with other people some of the time.
- Even small activities such as stair climbing or bending and stretching your limbs can help you feel better if you need to spend a lot of time in bed.
- Make use of the energy you have on the activities that are important to you.
- For more information see [Get Moving](#).



Schedule outings and activities

While you may feel unmotivated to do things, “just doing it” can enhance your feelings of wellbeing. These ideas can help you get started:

- Think of activities that made you feel good before cancer. Could you start doing them again, perhaps in a modified form? Or would you prefer something new and different?
- It does not need to be fancy or difficult: simple activities like doing a crossword puzzle or visiting a library, either online or in person, can improve well-being.
- Make a point of spending some time outside every day, if the weather allows it.
- Make a list of activities and plan to do one every day: wellbeing increases when you incorporate activities into your routine.
- Schedule activities that you like into your day. Set reasonable goals.



Connect with others and get support

Just about all people experience greater wellbeing when they feel connected to, and supported by, other people. Depending on your personality and needs, some of these tips may work for you:

- Enlist your family and friends for both companionship and support; remember that most people are eager to help, especially if you let them know what you need.
- If sex is important to you, keep your sex life going. Be open to doing things a little differently. This can mean scheduling time for intimacy or expanding your definition of sex beyond intercourse.
- Join a support group for people who are going through similar experiences. Such groups give you a chance to share experiences in a safe environment find out what works for other people. Ask your healthcare team for referrals to support groups. There may be online support groups or groups over the telephone if that is easier for you to get to.
- Join an online forum, such as CancerConnection.ca, where you can participate in discussions and learn from other people's comments. Good websites to start a search for information are often public, non-profit websites.
- Get professional support from a therapist, who can help you adjust to the impact of cancer.
- For more information see [Getting Support](#).



Manage stress and worry

Needless to say, constant stress and worry make it difficult to achieve wellbeing. To get a handle on such feelings:

- Learn and practice deep breathing—take long, deep breaths and slowly breathe out. You can practice this wherever you are. A similar technique is called mindful breathing—you focus on your breath, paying attention to the little details.
- Practice muscle relaxation by tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. Just a few minutes can reduce stress and tension.
- Close your eyes and visualize a relaxing or pleasant scene, either from your memory and imagination. This can help you feel more alert and serene when you “come back” to the real world.
- For more information see [Relaxation Strategies](#).



Find meaning

A diagnosis of cancer can make you question a lot of things about life, leading to a state of “spiritual distress.” No matter what your religious or spiritual beliefs, seeking out meaningful experiences can restore your sense of harmony and wellbeing. Some approaches to consider:

- Some people find meaning through quiet reflection, while others prefer guidance from spiritual leaders. Follow your own intuition.
- Spiritual care practitioners provide help and comfort during the cancer journey. Ask someone from your healthcare team if they can connect you to such a practitioner.
- Many cancer survivors find meaning by “giving back.” You may want to volunteer for a cancer group or to participate in a clinical trial—or maybe you prefer to step away from the cancer world for a while. The important thing is to volunteer for a cause you believe in.

Cannabis

There is very little proof that cannabis is successful in helping with wellbeing. The usefulness of cannabis for symptom management depends on a number of things, such as the type of cannabis and your health. In some cases, cannabis may make symptoms worse. It is important that you talk to your doctor before trying cannabis for your wellbeing.

Resources

For more information on cancer-related wellbeing, self-management strategies and support organizations, check out the resources below.

[Alberta Health - Living your best life with and beyond cancer](#)

[Australian Cancer Council - Living well after cancer](#)

[BC Cancer - Spiritual health](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society - Feeling your best during and after treatment](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society - Sex, intimacy, and cancer](#)

[Canadian Cancer Society - Life after cancer treatment](#)

Acknowledgement of sources

The content of this document has been adapted from the following sources:

- Alberta Health. Living your best life with and beyond cancer.
- Australian Cancer Council. Living well after council. 2018.
- BC Cancer. Spiritual health. 2020.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Feeling your best during and after treatment.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Sex, intimacy, and cancer. 2018.
- Canadian Cancer Society. Life after cancer treatment. 2018.
- Coping together: a practical guide for couples facing cancer. Dealing with stress and worry.
- Coping together: a practical guide for couples facing cancer. Getting on top of symptoms.
- [Ontario Mental Health Association: Positive mental health and well-being.](#)
- TEMPO: Feeling unmotivated or low on energy.
- TEMPO: Feeling overwhelmed.
- TEMPO: Getting emotional support.

Healthcare professional endorsement

The content of this document has been reviewed and approved by a team of healthcare professionals and clinical experts.

Disclaimer

Please note that this fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare professional. If you have questions about your health, or any medical issue, you should contact a healthcare professional right away. You should not delay seeking medical advice, or disregard professional medical advice, because of information in this fact sheet. Before beginning any health treatment, always consult your doctor. All care has been taken to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate at the time of publication. e-IMPAQc is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of, or related to, any use of the fact sheet, or because of any errors or omissions.

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