

# Dealing With Anger Within the Context of Cancer

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Anger is **one of the most common emotions** experienced by people undergoing treatment for cancer.

- Your anger may be felt toward multiple targets: the disease; the unfairness of having cancer; God; family members and friends for not acting the way you want them to in this situation; yourself for making choices you feel may have somehow contributed to the cancer; yourself for being so angry.
- Anger can be expressed **differently by different people**, and **differently by the same person in varying situations**. Sometimes it can be “loud” (e.g., screaming or lashing out at others) and sometimes it can be “quiet” (e.g., withdrawing from friends and family)
- Sometimes what looks like anger can actually be **masking other, more vulnerable emotions** such as anxiety, fear, grief, or depression.
- Sometimes anger can be **misdirected**. For example, although someone might be angry at the unfairness of having cancer, he/she might instead express that anger toward a spouse, child, or other family member/friend.

***Here are some suggestions for how to cope with anger when you are affected by cancer:***

- **Talk with someone** you trust as a way to get support and sort out what you are thinking and feeling.
- **Talk with other adults who have cancer**. It can be very helpful to talk with others going through similar experiences. Your medical team may be able to help you meet cancer patients interested in connecting.
- **Practice relaxation strategies**. Each day try to do at least one relaxing activity. Here are some examples: Close your eyes and focus on a pleasant image or scene while taking slow, deep breaths. Listen to calming music. Take a bubble bath. Get a massage. Watch a light-hearted movie. Take a walk. Practice yoga or other movement sequences. Bake or cook something you enjoy. Play a board game with a loved one or friend. Work on a puzzle. Take time to watch the sun rise or set.
- **Connect online**. The Internet can be a great way to connect with others who have cancer. Some people find it easier to communicate online, especially about difficult topics.

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- **Write it down.** Writing about your thoughts and feelings in a journal can be a way to relieve stress and process your thoughts and feelings.
- **Talk with your family and friends about what you need from them.** Are they becoming too involved or not giving you enough support?
- Having cancer often makes people feel out of control. It can be helpful to **focus on specific tasks you do have control over and work to accomplish them.**
- **Consider talking with a psychologist or social worker.** They can offer support and assist you in finding ways to manage your anger, and teach you anger management strategies. They can also help provide support to your romantic partner, parents and/or children, or work with your family together.