

Finding Meaning

It is normal for people diagnosed with cancer to struggle with finding meaning, purpose or joy in their lives, or to question or doubt their previously held religious or spiritual beliefs.

Spirituality can be thought of as one dimension of human life that focuses on the essence of being human, the human soul, or the beliefs and values held that makes life meaningful and purposeful. Spirituality is the relationship people have with a force or power beyond themselves that helps them feel connected and enriches their lives.

Religion is a specific set of beliefs or practices usually connected to an organized group. Some people exercise spirituality by practicing their religious beliefs, while others find it outside of an organized religion such as in nature, the arts, or philosophy.

Spirituality/Faith/Religion may help patients and families find a deeper meaning or purpose to their life and experience personal growth.

Content adapted from websites below.

Each person has unique spiritual needs based on his/her family, culture, or religious community. Therefore, you may be unsure about how to bring up the subject with your health care team. However, doctors and nurses are accustomed to talking to patients and families about spiritual needs. Your cancer care professionals know that these beliefs can influence patients' attitudes and beliefs toward cancer, treatment decisions and other challenges. Most hospitals and cancer centers have pastoral care departments to help you cope with the challenges you are facing. Social workers or other care team members may be helpful, too.

Experts say that spiritual or religious practices can help you adjust to the life changes cancer and its treatment can produce. Patients who rely on their faith or spirituality tend to experience increased hope and optimism, freedom from regret, higher satisfaction with life, and feelings of inner peace.

Studies show that spirituality can have a direct impact on quality of life.

Benefits shown in studies include:

- Decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and destructive anger
- Decreased feelings of loneliness
- Decreased alcohol and drug abuse
- Lowered blood pressure
- Better control of pain, nausea, and discomfort

Spiritual practices that may help you cope with your cancer and its treatments include:

- Participating in religious ceremonies or gatherings
- Praying or having someone else pray for you
- Meditation or meditative breathing
- Reading scripture or other holy works
- Repeating a passage from your religious tradition to reinforce its message
- Using the language of your religion, such as Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, or Latin, in your prayers
- Listening to classical or spiritual music
- Yoga
- Engaging with the arts such as painting, drawing, music, or dance
- Talking about spiritual matters with someone else
- During times of pain and discomfort, during treatments, or when you feel alone, these and other practices may bring a sense of wholeness, connectedness and peace.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NCCN, Finding Comfort in Spirituality](#)
- [NIH, Spirituality in Cancer Care \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NCI Support for People with Cancer, Taking Time Booklet](#)
- [HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™, Can't Believe I Have Cancer](#)
- [Book, Albom, NM. \(1997\). *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Random House, New York.](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Strengthening the Spirit](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [American Cancer Society, ¿Cómo podría la progresión de mi cáncer afectar la espiritualidad y fe religiosa de mi hijo?](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, NLa espiritualidad en el tratamiento del cáncer \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NIH, Institúo Nacional Del Cáncer, Su fe y espiritualidad](#)