

WORLD CANCER DAY FEBRUARY 4

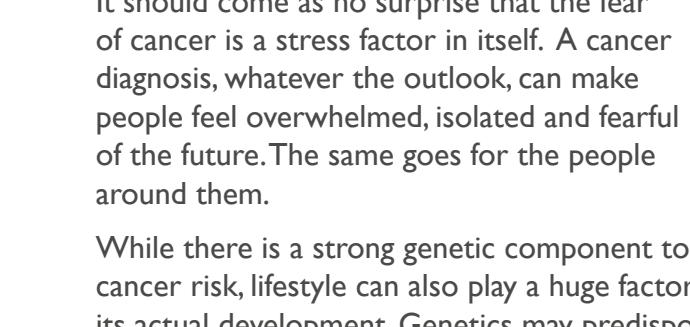


TACKLE YOUR STRESS TO BEAT CANCER

Life is quite simply stressful, but how we deal with the stress that life brings us can have an enormous impact on our health – even when it comes to life-changing conditions such as cancer.

On 4 February it is World Cancer Day, and the focus is on the importance of early cancer detection and screening. The earlier cancer is detected, the higher the chances of successful treatment and full recovery.

WHY ARE WE SO FEARFUL OF CANCER?



According to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Oncology, cancer rates have increased significantly over the last decade. Much of that is due to improved early detection, but the world population is also ageing, and together with that, the number of people who are diagnosed with cancer increases.

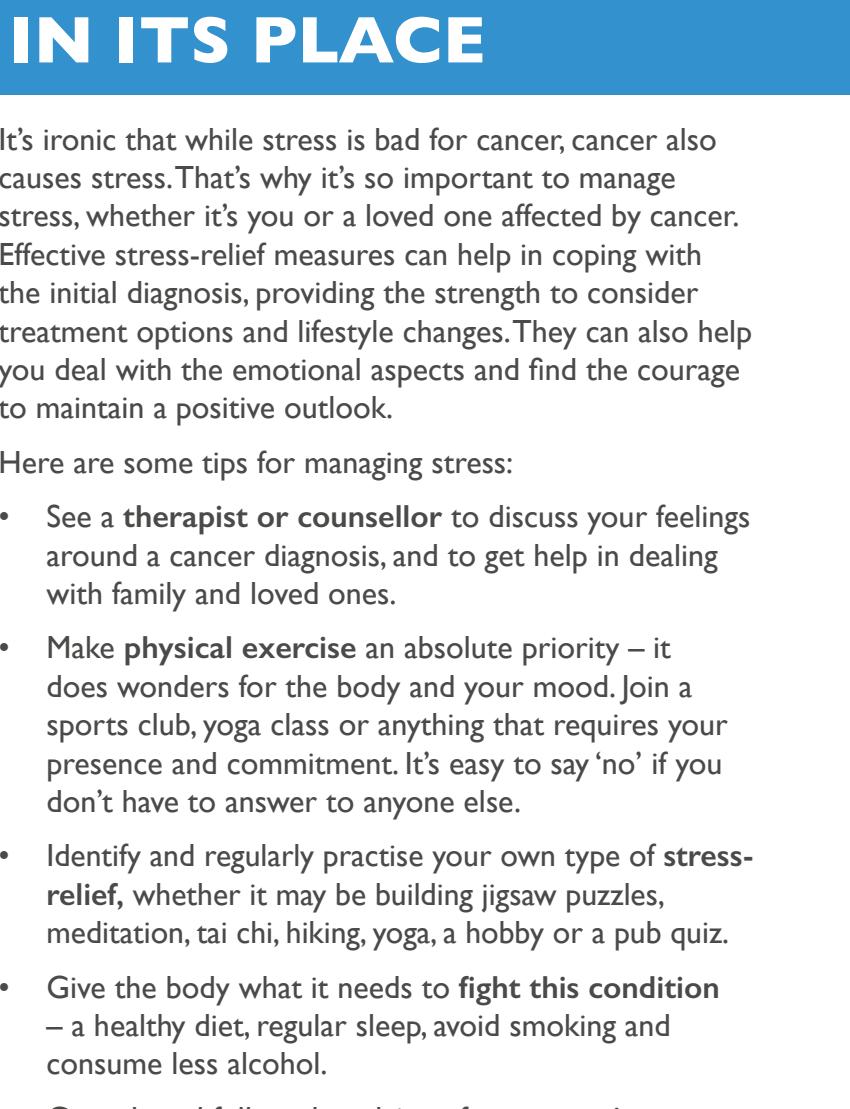
Many people continue to see a cancer diagnosis as a death sentence. It is sometimes also this fear that drives people to avoid initial screenings, despite early detection being so crucial.

STRESS AND CANCER RISK

It should come as no surprise that the fear of cancer is a stress factor in itself. A cancer diagnosis, whatever the outlook, can make people feel overwhelmed, isolated and fearful of the future. The same goes for the people around them.

While there is a strong genetic component to cancer risk, lifestyle can also play a huge factor in its actual development. Genetics may predispose you, but how you choose to live can be the trigger. Putting the immune system under strain can impact its ability to detect and fight off cancerous cells.

Not only does stress place the immune system under enormous pressure, but many of the most widespread stress-relief mechanisms are unhealthy – such as smoking, drinking and overeating – and actually contribute to one's cancer risk. These unhealthy activities can place a heavy load on an overtaxed immune system, limiting its ability to deal with 'invaders'.



PUTTING STRESS IN ITS PLACE



It's ironic that while stress is bad for cancer, cancer also causes stress. That's why it's so important to manage stress, whether it's you or a loved one affected by cancer. Effective stress-relief measures can help in coping with the initial diagnosis, providing the strength to consider treatment options and lifestyle changes. They can also help you deal with the emotional aspects and find the courage to maintain a positive outlook.

Here are some tips for managing stress:

- See a **therapist or counsellor** to discuss your feelings around a cancer diagnosis, and to get help in dealing with family and loved ones.
- Make **physical exercise** an absolute priority – it does wonders for the body and your mood. Join a sports club, yoga class or anything that requires your presence and commitment. It's easy to say 'no' if you don't have to answer to anyone else.
- Identify and regularly practise your own type of **stress-relief**, whether it may be building jigsaw puzzles, meditation, tai chi, hiking, yoga, a hobby or a pub quiz.
- Give the body what it needs to **fight this condition** – a healthy diet, regular sleep, avoid smoking and consume less alcohol.
- Consult and follow the advice of your **treating doctor or oncologist**.
- Take time to focus on your **mental health** as a cancer diagnosis can be a devastating experience.
- Acknowledge that cancer is also difficult for the people around you. Spend **quality time** with loved ones and invest in these relationships, especially if they nurture you on your journey.
- Contact **The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)** to find out about **support groups** in your area. There is a big variety, dealing with every aspect of the cancer journey. This can be a safe space for sharing information and exchanging tips on various coping strategies. Also hear inspiring stories of the journeys of cancer survivors.

If your life has been touched by a cancer diagnosis, remember that you can contact our employee health and wellness programme for support.

References

The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)
Cancer Treatment Centers of America
Medical News Today

- ▶ Education department toll free: 0800 111 011
- ▶ Send a USSD to: *134*664*38#
- ▶ Email: wced@mhg.co.za

Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves