

Managing the Fear and Anxiety that can Accompany Bladder Cancer

Sermsak (Sam) Lolak, MD, FACLP
Life with Cancer at Inova Schar
Cancer Center



Dr. Sam Lolak:

The next part I'm going to give you some strategies to help you deal with cancer anxiety. First of all, you don't want to deny. Having anxiety around cancer is very common, but at the same time you don't want to over-identify with it, meaning that you don't want to let this anxiety consume or become your identity. So one thing that can really help is to create that healthy routine and then stick to it.

The reason is that when you do something over and over, it becomes a routine. And then like I mentioned before, anxiety is about the future. But

when you do something the same thing over and over, every day, every week, it helps transcend time and it helps you regain that sense of control, because they're predictable. So you want to anchor your day with routines and healthy habits. Exercise is a good one, socialization's a good one. It doesn't matter. It can be anything. It could be your morning routine, how you wake up and exercise and sit with a cup of coffee and reading newspaper and then maybe in the evening go out for a walk and then once or twice a week having coffee with your friends, and then weekend going out, do some more exercise.

So when you starting to fill your calendar with those routines, it does help with anxiety. That's one strategy. The next one is to find balance. And a lot of this I have to admit that it's easier said than done, but nevertheless if you keep working on it, it can really help with your anxiety. What type of balance that you want to find? First, balance between control and acceptance. Like I mentioned before, anxiety is your brain's attempt to try to control the situation, but most of those situation is easily out of our control. That's when acceptance can be really handy, right? Because you want to focus on the things that you can control. And then balance between enjoying the moment and worry about the future or plan about the future. When you have cancer or in life in general, you cannot, if you spend all your time thinking or preparing a plan for the future, it's going to take that energy and time away from actually living, actually enjoying the moment.

Dealing with "Cancer Anxiety"



- Don't deny it (but don't over-identify with it)
- Create healthy routines and stick to it
 - Routines transcend time and can help you regain a sense of control because they are predictable
 - Anchor your day with healthy habits



Dr. Sam Lolak:

But on the other hand, nobody can just live their life as if it was their last day either, right? Because you have to have some plan. You have to be able to strike that balance. Another balance that may be good to think about when you have cancer is balance between distraction.

Sometimes when

you feel overwhelmed, it's easy or it's helpful to distract yourself and do something else, especially if it's moving your body, talking with friends, so that it can help you shift the focus from the things that you're stressful about. But again, you cannot live your life trying to distract yourself all the time, especially when you deal with cancer. At some point you have to be able to experience the feeling that coming from having the cancer, the feeling of grief and loss and sadness and anger, whatever it is, and then be able to reflect on it and process it, so that eventually you make sense of your experience.

And there are many activities that can help you do that. Journaling, including just writing freely, can help. Sometime reading cancer memoir. Doing art or meditation can help with that. Or you can also engage in counseling or psychotherapy to help the professional help process your experience. When you in the midst of cancer treatment or diagnosis, it's easy to look into the future and just assume that this is going to be how you feel every single day, because this is how you're feeling now. But you have to remind

yourself that usually it's not accurate when you try to project your current feeling outlook into the future, because we change all the time, we change every day, and actually our brain changes literally. There's a process called neuroplasticity. The brain changes connection, changes the wiring all the time.

Find Balance



Between

- **“Control”** and **“Acceptance”**
- **“Enjoying the moment”** and **“worry/prepare/plan for the future”**
- **“Experience the feeling then process/ reflect on it”** and **“Distraction”**



- Try journaling, reading cancer memoir, art, meditation, counseling to help process your experience
- Don't project your current feeling, outlook into the future: We “change” over time
- Create and develop new/alternative narratives : - find a thread that links your pre and post cancer self to tell a coherent story
- Learn to shift perspectives - E.g., scan/test anxiety → learn new information → knowledge → power and sense of control to make decisions

So sometimes, most of the time it's not helpful to try to predict the future that I'm going to be feeling this and that way. Instead you want to focus on maybe developing new narratives. So trying to make sense of your whole experience, find a thread that links your pre and post cancer self so that you can tell your story in a more coherent fashion.

Dr. Sam Lolak:

When you feel anxious, what do you do? There's a lot of literature or

information online that's written about this, and you can find quality ones, just Google and go into repeatable websites. But there's some guidelines. So first of all, when you feel anxious, because anxiety almost always lives in your body. You want to first notice a sensation in your body, and then you want to acknowledge the feeling, right? That right now you're feeling anxiety, you're noticing anxiety.

Notice that I don't say I am anxious. Instead I encourage you to think of anxiety as a state that comes and goes, right? So you notice anxiety versus you over-identify with it. Saying I'm anxious because anxiety is not you, it's just the experience that you have. And then you want to make space for your anxiety by slowing down, slow breathing. There's a good breathing technique called 4-7-8. You breathe out, you breathe in four seconds, you pause for seven seconds, and then you breathe out eight seconds or count to eight, doesn't have to be eight seconds. You move your body, that's why things like exercise and yoga can really help, because you make space for that anxiety.

What if you have a lot of rumination? So rumination is basically you're thinking something, the same thing over and over and over, and you can't get out that rabbit hole. And we all know that that's not helpful, just to think the same thoughts over and over. There's some strategies that can help with that. First, you want to ask a question, why is that rumination there? And is it helpful? How helpful it is to your situation? Sometimes you get insight from that, but most of the time you come to a conclusion that it's not very helpful. Because it is, basically it's a futile attempt to control the future. Rumination is basically your brain trying to get some sense of control. It gives illusion that you are something that can help even though it doesn't, right?

When you feel anxious



- Notice sensation in the body
- Acknowledge the feeling "I am noticing..." (VS I AM anxious)
- make space for your anxiety
 - Slow down
 - breathe through it
 - (4-7-8 breathing, box breathing)
 - move your body



Rumination



- To manage rumination, ask : why it's there and how helpful it is to your situation ?
- Rumination is futile attempt to control the future. It gives the illusion that you are doing something and that it will help
- Effort of worrying doesn't have any effects on the future. (Planning is useful up to a point , after that it becomes unproductive)
- Can be unconscious attempt to avoid dealing with the loss (trying to control future so don't have to process the pain in the present)

Dr. Sam Lolak:

So you want to remind yourself that the energy and effort that you put into worry actually doesn't have any effects on the future, especially if it's the rumination type. Now you can plan things and then you can do things that affect your future. But when you ruminate on thing, when you think the same thing over and over, even though you spend a lot of energy, it doesn't affect your future at all, right? And you want to remind yourself that this rumination can be unconscious attempt to avoid dealing with the loss. When your brain is trying to focus on controlling the future so that you don't have to think about the things in the past that is painful. So now those are some of the reminders, and then once you recognize that these may be what's going on, then it gives you some power to do something about it.

Once you ask those questions, you do the breathing techniques, you do those things that I mentioned, you feel a little bit settled, then you can ask more questions. What am I anxious about? Just pick one thought that you have,

that you seem to be ruminating, and then ask, what's under my control in that situation and what's not under my control? You can ask, is it worth spending energy for these things that I'm worried about?

Does it really matter how important it is? And then you can start to manage them by asking questions like, what can I do now or plan to do to deal with

this in a way that is consistent with my values and priorities? That's when the information about your priorities and your values can come in really handy. Because all the activities and actions that you do should be consistent with your values, whether it's compassion, it's family, things like that. It helps you make the right decision.

Then once you know what you're going to plan to do with it, have the next step, then you can let that anxiety or let that thoughts go. And this is when the distraction may be helpful, because if you have a hard time letting go, then you can distract yourself. Again, you want to have time to think or reflect on

your values and your priorities. You want to think short term. This strategy can be really helpful when you try to manage overwhelming anxiety about a lot of things when you in the midst of the treatment. Think about short term first. Over the next couple weeks, what's my focus?

Managing rumination

INOVA[®]
Schar Cancer Institute

- Once settled, ask
 - “What am I anxious about ?”
 - Pick one thought and ask :
 - “What’s under my control and what’s not ?”
 - Is it with worth spending energy for ?(does it really matter, how important)
 - “What can I do now or plan to do now that is consistent with my values and priorities ?
 - “How much energy should I spend” “when ?”
- Then let go

INOVA[®]
Schar Cancer Institute

- Remind yourself of your values and priorities
- Think “short-term” goals but keep track of long-term ones
- F.O.M.O. → J.O.M.O

FOMO VS JOMO

Don't think six months, 12 months yet, think you're trying to pull back a little bit and just say, okay, what about next week? What about next couple weeks? And then what about the next month? And then once you do the short term right, the long terms will come. Okay?

Dr. Sam Lolak:

And then the next thing is you want to turn what we call FOMO, which is fear of missing out. Whenever you see Facebook or social media, you start to compare, I wouldn't be able to go to this nice vacation, go to this concert or having a good time, you have fear of missing out. But instead you turn that into what they call, JOMO or joy of missing out.

That missing out is not necessarily a bad thing because that's what life is about. When you choose one thing, then you miss out on the other things. Instead you make the most of the things that you have to do or you choose to do. And these other practices, what we call gratitude practice, can be really helpful in this, right? And the easiest way to do this is at the end of the day, every day, you write three things that went really well that day or three things that you are feeling grateful for and you keep doing that every single day.

What it does is it help prime your brain to look for more positive things, the things that go well in each day. It can also help you re-experience the meaningful, happy moments that you had that day to experience it again. So you benefit from it twice. Reminding yourself or recognizing that sense of awe can be extremely helpful in counteracting this sense of anxiety. And you don't have to be at Grand Canyon to experience a sense of awe. It can be daily thing. Sometimes just seeing animals playing, kids playing or rainbow after the rain, can give you that sense of awe. And then you learn to celebrate small wins. Not every win has to be big. It could be really small and the things that you're grateful for.

And then you can learn some practices that can help you be more in the present. Like I said, anxiety is about the future. So the more you can train your brain to know the difference between present and future, then the better you'll be able to manage the anxiety. Exercise can help, physical activities, mind, body

- Gratitude practice
- Sense of “awe”
- Celebrate small wins

Develop personal practices to lower stress and to be in the “present”

- Exercise and Physical Activities
- Mind/body : breathing, yoga, tai-chi, etc.
- Mindfulness

What is mindfulness ?

- The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment

(Kabat-Zinn, 2003)

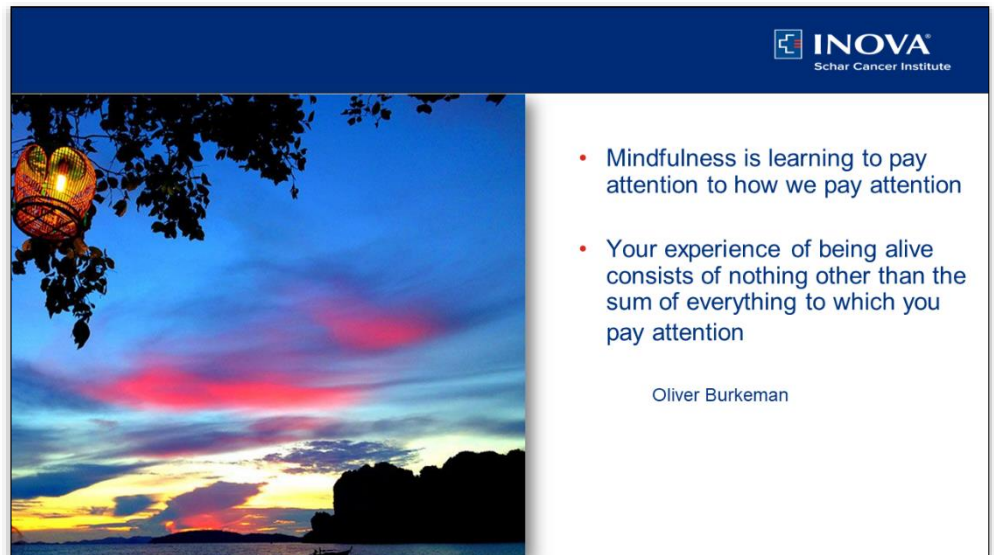
techniques, and then specific practices called mindfulness can be really helpful.

Dr. Sam Lolak:

So what is mindfulness? This is a big topic, but I'm going to not spend a lot of time because we sort of running low on time, but again, you can readily go online. There's a lot of good websites, podcasts, apps, publication that can help you learn more about mindfulness. Which is essentially the awareness that immerses through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and doing it in a non-judgmental way.

So essentially it's really learning how to pay attention to how we pay attention. And it can help you feel, you look at life more clearly, right? It's just a cartoon that I like to put in my slides. When you walk your dog, who do you think is happier? Right? Between you that's kind of thinking about a hundred million things and then the dog, which is enjoying the scenery.

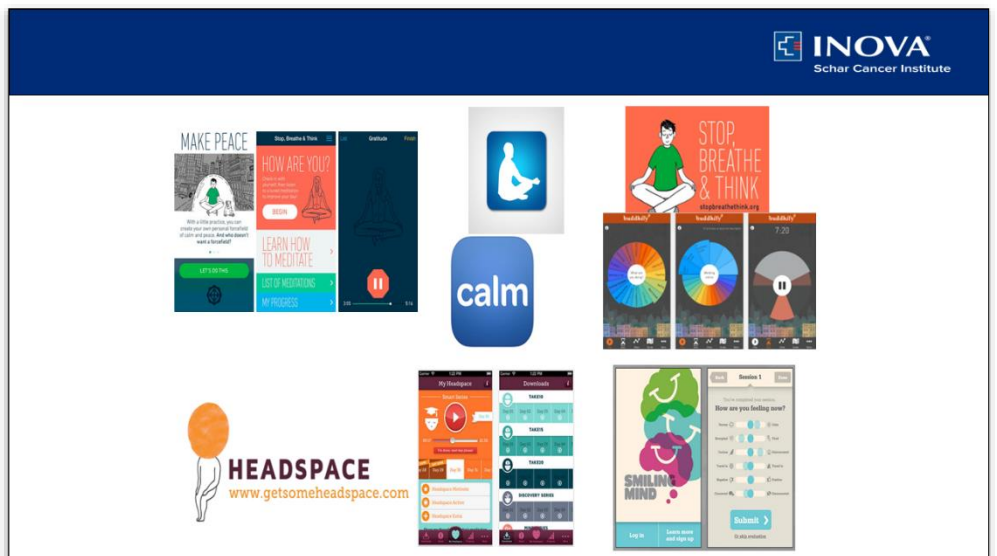
John Kabat-Zinn, who is a mindfulness researcher and teacher, famously said, "You cannot stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." That's how mindfulness works. And there are many apps and programs and resources that you can search out, classes that can help more and practice more about mindfulness, but that's a key word, because it is a skill, so it gets easier and better with practice.



INOVA
Schar Cancer Institute

- Mindfulness is learning to pay attention to how we pay attention
- Your experience of being alive consists of nothing other than the sum of everything to which you pay attention

Oliver Burkeman



INOVA
Schar Cancer Institute

MAKE PEACE

HOW ARE YOU?

LEARN HOW TO MEDITATE

calm

STOP, BREATHE & THINK

HEADSPACE
www.getsomeheadspace.com

SMILING MIND

Dr. Sam Lolak:

Self-care is always important, especially when it comes to stress, anxiety, and health in general. So basically you want to do these things well, eat, sleep, rest, exercise, socialize, laugh, learn to play, and also pray, quote unquote, pray, whatever that means to you. If you do those well, then you practice good self-care. Self-compassion is another big topic that can be really helpful in many patients. A lot of us seem to have a higher standard when it comes to ourselves that we are not so self-

compassionate, but we can be really compassionate to the others. But when you think about it, we are a difference, whether it's you or it's me, ourself or the others. We are experiencing losses and pain and things that happen in our lives. So you are not less deserving of compassion than anybody, right? Because we all share that common humanity. So that self-compassion or that self-love can be really beneficial things to practice.

I'm going to leave you with this easy practice that I usually recommend. It's called 5-3-1. It's by the Center of Healthy Minds, which is part of University of Wisconsin. They recommend that every single day if you find time to, five is five minutes, five minutes doing quiet reflection, meditation, breathing. And then three is three things. Should practice. You write a thing of three things that went well or three things that you are grateful for. And then one random act of kindness. And this can be

kindness for strangers, kindness for people that you love, that you care for, or a kindness for yourself. If you do that every single day, I think it will improve your sense of wellbeing and happiness.

I'm going to leave you with a quote from Amanda Gorman, who's the nation's first youth poet laureate. And she says, "If you are alive, you are afraid. If you are not afraid, then you're not paying attention. Yet fear can be love trying its best in the dark. So do not fear your fear. Own it. Free it." Okay, so I think that was my last slide, and thank you very much for your attention and I believe we have some time for Q&A.

Practice good "SELF CARE"

INOVA
Schar Cancer Institute

- Eat,
Sleep,
Rest,
Exercise,
Socialize,
Laugh,
Play,
"Pray"
WELL

Self-care is an act of self-love.

fb.com/CurlInHairdChica
www.thecurlghairedchica.com

5-3-1

INOVA
Schar Cancer Institute

5 | MEDITATE
Meditate for 5 minutes

3 | GRATITUDE
Write down 3 good things

1 | KINDNESS
Do 1 act of kindness

<http://centerofhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/try-the-5-3-1-practice>
Photo: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Cplam7DXyAArVvK.jpg>

BCAN would like to thank our sponsors

**EMD
SERONO**

Pfizer

Genentech
A Member of the Roche Group

 **MERCK**
INVENTING FOR LIFE

 **UroGen[®]**
Pharma

for their support