

At Diagnosis: Emotions

It's among the most jarring diagnoses a doctor will ever deliver: that you have cancer. When Leah Davis learned she had leukemia, her first reaction was disbelief, followed by a struggle to wrap her mind around the news.

"It was surreal, but I think at the time I was just trying to process it."-Leah, Patient

"To find out they have a cancer diagnosis is surprising, scary, alarming, a whole bunch of emotions can come up."-Dr. Wendy Baer, MD, Psychiatric Oncologist

Those emotions may include feeling overwhelmed, angry, worried, anxious, sad or guilty about being a burden to loved ones.

"I had a few days where I think I was down. I'm like, "Why did this happen?" And so, what I did, because I do have a strong, for me, a strong spiritual foundation, I had to use the tools to help bring me up."-Leah, Patient

One tool is to share your feelings with others, whether family and friends, a support group, a counselor or your health care team.

"Depending on how things go the next couple of weeks."-Patient

In addition, you may find it helpful to write down your feelings in a journal. Getting enough sleep, being physically active, and doing things you enjoy may also help you feel better emotionally. Relaxation techniques can be beneficial as well.

"Some patients find that it's very helpful to have a relaxation routine, whether it's lavender lotion or a warm bath."- Dr. Wendy Baer, MD, Psychiatric Oncologist

Leah has found that meditation helps ease her mind.

"It doesn't mean that you have to sit still and empty your mind. It can be a meditation that's focused on mindfulness. Trying to stay present. You work on your breathing, even to the point where you feel the air coming in your nose and feel the air leaving your body."- Dr. Wendy Baer, MD, Psychiatric Oncologist

Music was also helpful for Leah.

"I found a spiritual song. And that spiritual song was the thing that I kept holding on. I would listen to it. I would sing. Then I would remember myself being brought back up."-Leah, Patient

Having someone help you navigate through diagnosis and treatment can help make the process feel less overwhelming. For Leah, that person was her sister, Christi.

"Once that cry was out of me, it was business. Boom, boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom."

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And making sure that Leah was okay.”-Christi, Patient’s Sister

“From the very beginning, Christi was there. That meant everything to me. That meant life to me. It meant that I had someone there to support me.”-Leah, Patient

A sense of gratitude for the people and good things in your life, as Leah felt, can help counter negative feelings.

“It was a big comfort for you to help me the way that you did.”-Leah, Patient

So, can trying to stay positive as much as possible, something Leah credits for getting her through two years of rigorous treatments.

“I remember one time I was walking around the ward. The head nurse stopped me. She said, “You are so positive.” I said, “Thank you.” She said, “Don’t stop. It’s holding on. It’s having hope.”-Leah, Patient