## Well – Being After Cancer

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#### Depression

- Mild or temporary
- Severe/ongoing

#### Anxiety

- Fear of recurrence
  - Cancer in the body?
     Cancer in the mind?
- Heightened sense of vulnerability
  - Distress associated with reduction in contact/treatment
  - Other things can go wrong
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms
  - Intrusive thoughts and worries
  - Memories and psychological distress exacerbated by exposure



- Distress/Loss Associated with Post-Treatment Physical Health (Delayed or Immediate)
  - Fertility
  - Changes in sexual functioning
  - Lymphedema
  - Fatigue and energy
  - Pain
  - Performing physical activity such as exercise
  - Secondary cancers
  - Cognitive impairment/changes
  - Sleep disruptions and changes
  - □ ¬ Bodily function impairments/changes
  - Weight gain
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#### **Relational Stressors**

- Impact on intimate relationships
- Impact on children
- Fear for others (e.g., children, siblings)

#### **Economic and Vocational/Educational/Employment** Concerns

- Returning to work or school
- Changes in job, promotion, accomplishment
- Changes in drive
- Health insurance maintenance



#### Spiritual/existential

- Meaning of experience/life
- Challenges to faith
- Reordering of life priorities
- Positive growth



#### Other Life Stressors

- Divorce, or loss of spouse/partner
- Parenting struggles
- Loss of family of origin
- Caregiving responsibilities for others
- Health concerns/comorbid illness
- Loss of employment

Spiritual and existential crises

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# Cancer as Foreground, Cancer as Background



"Someone likened cancer to a pink elephant, and the pink elephant initially is right there in front of your face, you know... and then as you get better, the pink elephant maybe goes to another room. And then as you get much better, the pink elephant goes down the street, but it's always there and you always know it's there. And, I think that , as you approach appointments, the pink elephant [from] down the street, you know, comes in the living room again."



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# The Journey of Cancer Survivorship is Defined by Movement

- Movement of Cancer from Foreground Background
- Passage of Time
- Movement of Flux in Psychological States
  - Shifts from fully successful adaptation to acute fear anxiety and worry
  - Shifts from states of well-being to states of loss

## Periods of Vulnerability

- New Events or Triggers
  - New symptoms of unknown origin
    - Work-up of symptoms
    - Awaiting results of work-up/watch and reassess
  - Diagnosis of late effects
  - Secondary cancer
  - New primary
  - New onset of other health problems
  - Scientific findings altering treatment strategies for future patients
  - Recurrence of cancer
  - Diagnosis friends/family
  - Notable cancer-related media events



## Periods of Vulnerability

- Ongoing
  - Bothersome continuing symptoms
  - Regular medical follow-up/surveillance
- Transitions
  - End of treatment
  - Transitions in adjuvant treatment
     (e.g., transition on/off trastuzumab, hormonal therapy)
  - Career and health insurance changes
  - Reproduction Initiation
  - Stress and anxiety become imprinted

# Stress and Brains



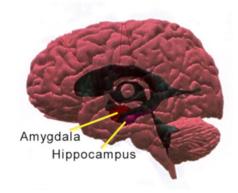
#### **Our Brains and Stress**

- The brain is very adept at storing long-term memory events when it experiences fear
- Amygdala plays a crucial role
  - Part of the limbic system located on the top of the brainstem and buried under the cortex
  - Limbic system involved in emotions especially survival
  - Almond shaped structure
  - Amygdala and hippocampus play important roles in memory

#### Stress and the Brain

- The amygdala is responsible for
  - what memories are stored
  - where the memories are stored in the brain.
- Amygdala's determination of memories
  - based on how huge an emotional response an event invokes
- Anxiety is very easy to acquire, but once the brain circuits are in place they are very difficult to delete





#### Stress and the Brain

- We are hard wired to react to many external stimuli with behavioral responses based on fear or anger
- The body and mind cannot accurately be conceptualized as distinct and separate entities

# Sympathetic Nervous System

- SNS kicks in
  - adrenaline is released
  - eliciting reaction in almost every organ of the body
- Mediates vigilance, activation and mobilization
- Responsible for the initiation
  - fight, flight freeze response

## The Fight or Flight Response

- Sympathetic Nervous System
  - Heart races
  - Muscles tighten
  - Pupils dilate
  - Shallow breathing
  - Blood flow directed to the heart for action
  - Lots of hormones power up
- Great and necessary system
- Instinctive evolutionary response
- Kept our ancestors and us alive

## Parasympathetic Nervous System

- Associated with sleep and other states of relaxation
- Activated by meditation, yoga, relaxation techniques
- Responsible for calming down the body's response to
  - Fight, flight, freeze
  - Heart slows
  - Muscles looses
  - Pupils constrict
  - Deep breathing
  - Blood flow re-directed back to other parts of the body
  - Reduction in adrenaline production
  - The Body's way of down regulating

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## Chronic Stress in Survivorship

- You have had a life threatening experience
  - It does not completely go away
- Ongoing dangers
- In addition to normal stresses of living
- How do you manage something more subtle and maybe more difficult?



## The Challenge with Cancer

- How do you manage your sense of
  - Threat
  - Danger
  - Stress
- When the threat is not
  - Immediate
  - Imminent
  - Does not pass
  - Becomes chronic
- When the automatic relaxation response does not come



## Breaking the Cycle

- Facilitate relaxation
- Modify the way you subjectively experience your own body states
- Use of various techniques breaks the cycle of the stress response
  - Relaxation
  - Self-soothing interventions

# Tools for Optimizing Psychological Well Being



#### Mindfulness or Mindful Awareness

- The process of the moment –to moment attention to present experience with a stance of open curiosity
- Distinction between doing and being
- Focusing on
  - Breath
  - Bodily sensations
  - Sound
  - Eating
- Can be applied in any situation or environment (example cell phone ringing)



# Strategy for Being in the Present: Ask Questions that focus on Now

- Do I have cancer today?
- What can I do today that gives my life meaning?
- What am I feeling now?
- What am I grateful for at this moment?
- Who do I have in my life right now?
- What are my current strengths?
- Am I living today as I want to be living?
  - If not, what can I do to change that

## **Breathing Techniques**

- Four Square Breathing
  - 1Take a deep breath in for four seconds
  - 2 Hold your breath for four seconds
  - 3 Slowly exhale for four seconds
  - 4 Pause for four seconds, doing nothing, then repeat the process as many times as you need until you calm down



- Attention to Breath
- Signal Breath
- Diaphragmatic Breathing

#### **Autogenic Training**

- Allows the conscious mind to connect to the unconscious control of the autonomic nervous system
  - A form of self-hypnosis
- Typical training
  - Heaviness
  - Hand-warming
  - Breathing
  - Warm belly
  - Slow heart beat
  - Cool forehead
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation

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# **Guided Imagery**

- A safe place
- A place in nature that is relaxing
- Using visualization to create that space



# Relaxation Exercise



#### Self-Talk

- Identify worrisome thoughts
- Reframe the thoughts
- Develop thoughts that replace or contradict the worrisome thoughts
- Develop reinforcing statements



# Co-existing Emotional (Affect) States

- Learning to tolerate the juxtaposition of two opposing feelings or thoughts
- Learn that there is always more than one feeling available
- Computer Screen



#### Other Techniques

- Dialing Down Anxiety
  - Imagine you have a dial
- Gratitude
  - Development and maintenance of positive affect
- **Resource Utilization** 
  - Internal resources and external ones
    - Family and friends
  - Memories of successful outcomes
  - Real or imagined support figures

## Bathing your Brain Comfort

- Knowing when you are getting agitated
- Understanding your triggers
- Identifying sources of support
- Having tools to downregulate your response
- Ongoing use of relaxation
- Stopping self from immediately responding

# Managing Stress is NOT Controlling Stress

- Control is a word that gets people into trouble
- Control is actually part of the problem, a goal we cannot meet
- Myth about controlling all kinds of things that are outside of our control
- More honest/useful to think of this process of managing stress, adding to your sense of well being

#### Post Traumatic Growth

- PTG follows an initial period of turmoil and distress
- Over time, many individual develop a growing sense of enrichment and satisfaction that appears to exceed prior levels



#### Post -Traumatic Growth

- "Growth"
  - Individual undergoes a stage in their personal development that extends beyond their previous functioning



#### Post Traumatic Growth

- Relationships with friends and family are stronger
- More emotionally connected
- Greater feelings of closeness
- Improvements in quality of marital relationships
- Importance of awareness of one's importance to others
- Increased feelings of compassion for others/felt more deeply
- Renewed appreciation for life

#### Post Traumatic Growth

- New set of priorities or changes in goals
- Shifts in life, school, family how they relate to themselves
- Many feel they have grown stronger, giving new resources and skills to tackle life's problems
- May feel more competent
- Empowerment to make changes



#### Three Wishes

- Cancer could be prevented
- Cancer could be cured for everyone
- Cancer patients and their families receive optimal integrated medical and psychosocial care throughout the continuum of care



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