

Coping with the Emotional Roller Coaster

Cancer can stir up so many feelings—fear, anger, relief, hope, sadness, numbness—sometimes all in the same day. Nothing is “wrong” with you for feeling this way. This is a human response to a very hard thing.

This gentle guide can help you:

- Name what you feel
- Remember that ups and downs are normal
- Try simple practices for days when emotions feel too big—or when you feel nothing at all

1. Name What You’re Feeling

Sometimes the first step is just putting a word to what’s happening inside.

You might say:

- “Today I feel scared.”
- “Today I feel angry.”
- “Today I feel numb and flat.”
- “Today I feel grateful and worried at the same time.”

You can:

- Write it in a journal: “Right now I feel...”
- Tell a trusted person: “I don’t need you to fix this; I just need you to listen.”
- Pray it honestly: “God, today I feel...”

There are no “bad” emotions here—only honest ones. Hormonal changes are almost guaranteed, so prepare by allowing yourself to be honest with what is happening.

2. Remember: Ups and Downs Are Normal

Your body, hormones, energy, and life circumstances are all shifting. It makes sense that your emotions move too.

- You can feel **grateful** and **grief** in the same moment.
- You can be **relieved** to have a plan and still **afraid** of what’s ahead.
- You can have **good days** and **hard days** without “losing progress.”

Try reminding yourself:

- “It's okay that my feelings change.”
- “I don't have to judge what I feel; I can just notice it.”

3. Practices for When Emotions Feel Too Big

When feelings start to spill over, these small steps can help bring things down to a gentler level.

a. 3 Slow Breaths

- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4
- Hold for 2
- Exhale gently through your mouth for a count of 6
- Repeat 3–5 times

You can add a simple phrase:

- Inhale: “God, be near.”
- Exhale: “Help me breathe.”

b. Grounding with Your Senses

Look around and name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel (your clothes, chair, blanket)
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste or remember tasting

*****This gently brings your mind back into the present moment.

c. Gentle Movement

If your care team says it's safe:

- Stretch your hands, arms, shoulders, and neck
- Take a short walk down the hall or around the room
- Roll your shoulders and unclench your jaw

Tiny movements can help release stored tension.

4. When You Feel Numb or “Shut Down”

Numbness can be a way your body tries to protect you from overwhelming situations. You are not “cold” or “uncaring”—you are tired and overloaded.

On numb days, try:

- Doing one very small thing: drink water, change into soft clothes, open a window
- Listening to one song that comforts you
- Writing one sentence: “Today feels...” even if all you write is “blank”

You don't have to force yourself to “be positive.” Just being honest is enough.

5. Let People In (Even a Little)

You don't have to carry this alone.

You might say to someone you trust:

- “I'm not okay today; can you just sit with me?”
- “I don't need advice; I just need you to hear me.”
- “Can you check on me this week? I'm struggling.”

If possible, consider:

- A counselor, therapist, or faith leader familiar with cancer support
- A support group where others understand this roller coaster

6. When You Need Extra Help

If you ever feel like hurting yourself, feel completely hopeless, or your emotions feel out of control:

- Tell your care team as soon as you can.
- Reach out to a crisis line, trusted person, or local emergency services.

Needing this kind of help is not a failure. It's a brave and wise response to a very heavy load.