Fear of Cancer Recurrence or Progression

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What are we afraid of?

- Fear of further treatment
- Fear of pain/suffering
- Worry about future uncertainty
- Fear of possibility of death
- Fear of losing physical capacities
- Worry about losing plans/activities
- Worry about impact on family/friends
What might it look like?

• Intrusive thoughts/worries
• Hypervigilance
• Avoiding medical appointments
• Seeking complete certainty
• Difficulty focusing on daily life/relationships
• Having trouble making plans
• Not enjoying life
• Feeling distressed, anxious, down, or angry
Planning

• Advanced Care Planning
  - Medical treatment decision maker
  - Advanced care directive
  - Will

• Legal and financial planning
  - Cancer council pro-bono legal and financial services
  - Financial planning
  - Centrelink for carers
Common emotional responses

- Shock
- Anger
- Exhaustion
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Overwhelmed
- Fear (e.g., of spread)
- Lack of control
- Hopelessness
- Grief
- Guilt
- Self-blame
- Uncertainty
- Relationship issues
- Isolation
Grief

- It can be helpful to acknowledge grief
- The distress of any significant loss
  - Death of loved one
  - Aspects of a relationship (e.g., sexuality)
  - Missed opportunities
  - Future plans
  - Financial
- Can be anticipatory
- Moves between loss-orientated and restoration-orientated
Managing emotions with self-care

- Self-care is the **intentional** time taken on a **daily basis** to look after yourself.

- Aim for at least one thing each day that feels like an **achievement**, and one thing that is **enjoyable**.

- Do not neglect yourself
  - Supportive relationships (friends, meeting new people, attending special events)
  - Looking after your health (exercise, nutrition, GP)
  - Sleep hygiene
  - Relaxation
  - Meaningful activities
  - Managing drug/alcohol use (e.g., at least 1-2 alcohol free days per week)
  - Notice unhelpful behaviours
Managing anxious thoughts

• Be aware of biases
  - Am I confusing a thought with a fact?
  - Am I jumping to conclusions?
  - Am I assuming my view of things is the only possible answer?
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?
  - Am I paying attention only to the dark side of things?
  - If a friend was going through this, what would I say to them?

• Schedule time to worry “out loud” (e.g., writing, talking)
• Differentiate between rumination and problem-solving
Meaning and Uncertainty

• It is helpful to know what can be controlled, and what cannot be controlled
  - e.g., Can control how to self-care, cannot control how you respond to treatment

• Identify values and use these to guide actions
  - Personal growth
  - Relationships
  - Recreation/leisure
  - Work/learning
Relationships with loved ones

• Talk! May need to schedule time
• Stay on topic
• Active listening
• Differentiate between solution-focused and emotion-focused communication
• Ask for help if needed
• Remind yourselves of what you share and what matters most between you
• Cancer free time
Barriers for men

• Worry about what others will think
• Feel they should be able to fix it themselves
• How they were brought up
• Social norms – men don’t normally ask for help
• A need to appear strong and fix things themselves
Access community and professional supports

• Speak with GP
• Attend support group
• See a psychologist
• MensLine 1300 78 99 78
• Beyondblue 1300 224 636