

**HEALING JOURNEY  
PROGRAM**

**LEVEL 1: WORKBOOK**

Developed for Wellspring by:  
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## THE HEALING JOURNEY PROGRAM: LEVEL ONE WORKBOOK

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## PREFACE TO THE 2022 REVISION OF THE HEALING JOURNEY PROGRAM

My name is Claire Edmonds, and it is my joy to be writing the 2022 updates of the Healing Journey material. I started working with Alastair Cunningham in 1986 at the Princess Margaret Hospital as he developed and expanded the Healing Journey Program. As I look back now over the materials that he and our team developed, I am struck by how far the field of psychosocial support for cancer patients has come. Back in the 1980s, it was a revolutionary idea that people could help themselves cope with cancer by learning skills and through self-reflection, but now it seems to be a far more acceptable idea, as witnessed by the success and expansion of organizations like Wellspring. In many ways, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wellspring is an auspicious time to be updating the Healing Journey materials, as both these organizations were influential in bringing these resources to patients and their caregivers and enabling them to be active participants in their cancer care.

I grew up in the Healing Journey Program, one of the early researchers and therapists who worked with Alastair. I earned my Ph.D. in Psychology; my dissertation researched the effect of long-term psychotherapy for patients with advanced cancer. I then developed many programs for Wellspring, including Volunteer Peer Support trainings and Care for the Professional Caregiver. I thought I knew a lot about cancer, but in 2015 I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and my education continued. Three years later, I was diagnosed with a second, unrelated cancer, ocular melanoma. The skills I learned at the Healing Journey Program were fundamental to my cancer experiences, and I do not know how I would have managed without them. I now have a deeply felt sense of the importance of self-help and understand the nuances of learning these skills while managing treatment, side effects and the changes that cancer brings physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

The Healing Journey has been more than my avocation. It has become a part of who I am, and I am profoundly grateful to Alastair and all my colleagues at the Healing Journey Program and the 1000's of patients and caregivers I have had the privilege of working with over the last 35 years.

I hope you find this work as compelling, helpful and transformative as I have. I wish you the very best on your journey.

Claire Edmonds, Ph.D., RP.

## BEGINNING YOUR HEALING JOURNEY

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Healing Journey at Wellspring

For many people, being diagnosed with cancer is like being jettisoned into a foreign, frightening world without a map. Whether the diagnosis comes after extensive medical investigation or is found during routine screening, it can shock the mind and the body. This is equally true for caregivers who may feel helpless as they take in the diagnosis and its meaning. There is a whole new language to learn, tests and treatments, new doctors, and sometimes new hospitals. There are the sights, sounds and smells of clinics and waiting rooms to take in, tests and scans to undergo, and the steady voice inside the head filled with worry about the future.

At Wellspring, you may participate live in a group or virtually online. However you choose to join, you will meet other people who are also coping with cancer. That first step over the threshold may feel like a big one. It may be the first time you have identified yourself to others as a cancer patient or caregiver or the first time you have asked for help. However, that first step will open up all kinds of resources to you, and the Healing Journey Program is a great way to start because it introduces you to a wide range of proven coping strategies and support.



People respond to a diagnosis of cancer in different ways. Some people try to put it out of their minds and pretend, as best they can, that nothing is wrong. Others feel shaken to the core and find it difficult to go on with the regular demands of daily life. Still, others may foster a positive attitude denying the impact that the disease has on them physically and emotionally. There is no right way to do cancer. Still, by seeking out the support of an organization such as Wellspring and a program like the Healing Journey Program, you are taking the first step toward finding ways to participate in your treatment and healing and learning strategies and skills to help you cope.

Being with other patients and caregivers may at first feel intimidating; you may be concerned that you will meet people who are sicker than you or hear frightening stories. However, at Wellspring, you might be struck by the amount of normalcy there is; people come and go to various programs, and there are many volunteers, many of whom have had or are coping with cancer, and still others who are caregivers. They can guide you on

which programs in which to participate. The kitchen has tea and coffee, and there are comfortable rooms to sit in between hospital appointments and programs. While you may see people in active treatment, without hair or who show other signs of illness, many look normal and seem to be coping fine. You can even speak one-on-one with a trained peer support volunteer who can listen to your story, offer support, and guide you through some practical aspects of coping with cancer. There is no judgment at Wellspring; you can come as you are, on good days, difficult days or whenever you like.

## The Cancer Roller Coaster

Coping with cancer can feel like a wild roller coaster ride. Some moments feel okay when things feel under control, and you might even feel hopeful. However, there can be those other moments that feel overwhelming and frightening when it is difficult to put one foot in front of the other. With these significant shifts in mood, some people say they feel like they are losing their minds too! These highs and lows are very normal. Although there are feelings of terror, sadness, depression, numbness and even anger, all these feelings are reasonable and understandable. Alastair Cunningham describes how he felt when he was first diagnosed with colon cancer in 1987:

*"It was a kind of disbelief initially, a sense of shock, even horror in the back of my mind. But like most men, I am pretty good (or bad!) at repressing my feelings, so for the next day or two, I didn't let myself feel very much. The worst time was telling my wife, Margaret, about it. I felt as if I was somehow letting her down. Over the subsequent weeks, there were periods of intense fear, especially when waiting for the surgery. Margaret had to keep reminding me not to shut her out. My mood went up and down; sometimes, I felt very good and confident, and at other times, I was living out a nightmare."*

Caregivers can be on their own roller coaster, trying to help their loved one, at times feeling shut out and at other times feeling at a loss as to how to help. For example, one caregiver was asked what the most important caregiving skill he needed was, and he responded, "mind reading"! Typically, a caregiver is slightly delayed in knowing how their loved one feels and how best to respond. It can be a delicate dance; sometimes, you may feel very out of sync.

Working together in the Healing Journey Program can give you a common base to help each other. You will have the opportunity to speak with other people in similar situations in a safe and confidential environment. Each session is led by a trained professional skilled at moving the group through the material and teaching the skills while allowing for plenty of conversation and acknowledging the different perspectives in the room. Not everyone can bring a caregiver to the program, but letting your friends and family know about your learned skills can be helpful and supportive.

## Who should Participate in the Healing Journey?

Cancer is unlike many diseases that come and go. You may have surgery and treatment and then be under the care of an oncologist for several years, monitoring your health. Some people are living with chronic cancer for which they receive treatment regularly. People join the Healing Journey at many points in their cancer experience.

Waiting for the initial treatment plan is challenging, and the mind often races to the scariest possibilities. There seems to be a lot of waiting, and it has been joked that the word 'patient' sounds like patience because that is what you need! However, once a treatment plan is developed, things become more apparent regarding the next steps. This is an excellent time to start the Healing Journey program because you can learn skills to help you with the waiting, surgery, and treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation. In addition, some preliminary evidence suggests that learning coping skills and receiving support early in the cancer experience may help prevent future relapses<sup>1 2</sup>.



Some people find this phase of active cancer treatment too busy to engage in programs and believe they might join when their treatment is over. This is when everyone expects the patient to feel better and get back to "normal," yet, the time after treatment can be very challenging because the feelings that go unacknowledged when in active treatment can start to arise. It takes time and support to process everything you have gone through, so many people seek help when returning to "normal" feels impossible.

Sometimes people come to the program several years after their treatment ends because something has triggered feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed. There is often a push to get back to normal as soon as possible. But in time, the emotions that have not yet been acknowledged can be triggered. Cancer changes us in so many ways, and it is crucial to allow yourself to seek the support you need where ever you are in your recovery.

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<sup>1</sup>Moreno-Smith, M., Lutgendorf, S.K., Sood, A.K. (2010). Impact of stress on cancer metastases. *Future Oncol* 6(12):1863-81.

<sup>2</sup>Perego, M., Tyurin, V.A., Tyurina, Y.Y., et.al. (2020). Reactivation of Dormant Tumor Cells by Modified Lipids Derived from Stress-Activated Neutrophils. *Sci Transl Med*. Dec 2; 12(572)

Finally, many people in the Healing Journey Program live with chronic cancer and undergo treatment regularly. Support is essential in managing the ongoing testing, treatments and the uncertainty this brings. We know from our research that the Healing Journey program improves the quality of life and mood in many patients, including those with metastatic or advanced cancer. There is also some evidence that it may help some patients live longer<sup>3</sup>.

This workbook will cover the material your group will work through over the next few weeks. Each session will begin with a brief relaxation or grounding exercise to help you prepare and focus. In addition, slides will illustrate the ideas in each session and an activity for learning a new coping strategy each week.

Learning new skills requires practice, so each exercise is recorded in an MP3 file that you can download and work with throughout the week. These skills build on each other and get easier with practice. This workbook also includes questions and explorations to support your engagement in the work. We hope the program is so compelling you will want to engage with it throughout the week. After all, it is all about you. The more you invest in the program, the more you will get out of it. Bring your workbook to each session so you can capture ideas and questions that arise for you. Write in it frequently and make it your own!



All Healing Journey resources are available on Well on the Web, under **SELF-PACED LEARNINGS AND RESOURCES**

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<sup>3</sup> Antoni, M.H., Dhabhar, F.S. (2019). Impact of psychosocial stress and stress management on immune responses in cancer patients. *Cancer*. May 01;125(9):1417-31.



## SESSION ONE

# ALLOSTATIC LOAD: THE BURDEN OF CHRONIC STRESS AND LIFE EVENTS

### Learning Exercise: Deep Muscle Relaxation

#### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

#### Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



#### CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

### Let's Practice

- Make yourself comfortable in the chair; feel the support that holds you
- Soften or even close your eyes and bring your attention to the movement of your breath
- Can you feel the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils, perhaps the chill of the air on your upper lip?
- Feel the sense of the air flowing down the back of your throat into your lungs
- Can you feel the expansion as your chest opens to receive the breath?
- Feel the fullness at the height of the breath and then follow the breath out of your body. Don't rush or stop your breath quickly. Let it take its time
- Let yourself experience the breath in all its intricate details. Enjoy your breathing for a few moments
- Perhaps you notice how the rest of your body engages in the breath. Do your shoulders rise as you inhale? Can you feel them dropping down from your ears as you exhale? Let your shoulders drop down.
- Can you feel the chair supporting your back? Can you soften your weight in the chair? Perhaps at this moment, you do not need to hold yourself up, perhaps you do not need to hold up others
- Just soften and breathe, breathe, breathe . . .
- Let one of your hands rest on your belly. Can you feel your abdomen gently rising as you inhale, falling as you exhale?
- It can be subtle; there is no need to force it. It's just a gentle rise and fall, a companion to the rhythm of the breath.
- Breath by breath, you are arriving. Moment by moment, you feel like coming home
- Enjoy a few more breaths, and then very easily, gently, with soft eyes, come back to the room

## What is Healing?

Healing is a term that comes up frequently at Wellspring, but what does it mean? Take some time to think about what healing means to you and engage with the group as you discuss it with your group.

For me, healing means:

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## How Does It Feel to be Here Today?

Identifying and expressing our feelings is a big step in processing them and understanding ourselves. Cancer evokes many emotions, which are very changeable or "labile." Writing about our feelings is a big step in the Healing Journey Program. You can start very simply.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about starting the Healing Journey Program or  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about being here today.

If it is difficult to find words, you can use a feeling wheel that lists feelings and expands on them. For example, anger might be the main feeling, but it could be related to frustration, disappointment, confusion or stress. An emotional wheel unpacks big feelings into smaller parts, and it might be helpful to you.

An Emotion Wheel is a circular graph that depicts the range of human emotions and how they relate to one another. If you search Emotion Wheel on the internet, you will find many examples you can use.

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## Quality of Life Effects of the Healing Journey Program

The Healing Journey Program has been well-researched over decades, and we know many things about the effects of learning coping skills within a supportive environment. The Healing Journey Program has been shown to:

- Improve mood, decrease depression, anger, confusion, and anxiety<sup>4</sup>
- Enhance a sense of control and an ability to cope<sup>5</sup>
- Improve the quality of life<sup>6</sup>
- May alleviate symptoms such as nausea, fatigue, and pain and improve sleep<sup>7</sup>

## How Does Cancer Develop in the Body?

Cancer is a disease of dysregulation (abnormalities or impairment in the regulation of a metabolic process). Cancer cells arise in the body all the time. Every time a cell divides, there is a small risk of a genetic "accident" that changes the daughter cells' behaviour, which that division created.

Roughly three billion cells divide daily, so these random accidents are common. Many of these accidents are harmless and do not affect the functioning of the cell. However, some changes are cancerous. Each cell has a life cycle and a job; for example, red blood cells carry oxygen around the body, live about three months and then die. Cancer cells don't know how to behave. They do not adhere to their natural life cycle, do not perform the jobs they were intended for, and do not die on time. Instead, they procreate quickly and pass on their faulty genetics.

However, the body is not passive in the face of these mutated cells. There are built-in systems that defend against these altered cells. For example, cells have their own self-destruct button that is pushed if they



<sup>4</sup>Cunningham, A.J. Tocco, E.K. (1989). A randomized trial of group psychoeducational therapy for cancer patients. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 14(2):101-114.

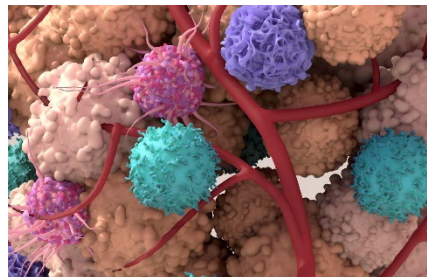
<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, A.J., Lockwood, G.A., Cunningham, J.A. (1993). A relationship between perceived self-efficacy and quality of life in cancer patients. *Patient Education and Counseling*, Volume 17(1): 71-78.

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, A.J., Lockwood, G.A., Edmonds, C.I. (1993). Which Cancer Patients Benefit Most from a Brief, Group, Coping Skills Program? *Intl J of Psychiatry in Med*, 23(4).

<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, A.J., Edmonds C.V., Hampson, A.W. (1991) A group psychoeducational program to help cancer patients cope with and combat their disease. *Advances*, 7(3), 41-56.

are too damaged to work properly (called apoptosis). Specialized immune cells also identify and kill cancerous cells in the body (Natural Killer Cells and T Lymphocytes). There are a lot of barriers that a cancer cell has to make it past to set up a colony or tumour.

One way to think of cancer cells is that they grow in a microenvironment or local neighbourhood. This neighbourhood has all sorts of other cells and functions that support healthy growth; there is a food supply from arteries and capillaries that deliver blood and "officer cells" roaming around and looking for cancer cells to destroy them. There are also neuroendocrines, hormones, cytokines and interferons and other messengers flood through these neighbourhoods, delivering information. It is a complicated community.



Other factors can cause cancer, such as viruses (e.g. Human Papilloma Virus), environmental cancer-causing agents (e.g. cigarette smoke, sunlight), or immune systems that are not equipped to work very well. The BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genetic mutations (related to breast and ovarian cancer, to name a few), are carried by some people with familial cancer. These genes do not cause cancer but prevent the immune system from picking it up. It is as if their toolbox is missing some of the equipment needed to repair or destroy faulty cells so cancer cells can grow into a tumour. Even age is a factor. As we age, our bodies may become less efficient. As our life span increases, there are more opportunities for these slips in cell division. The aging population and life span extension partly explain why cancer is so common.



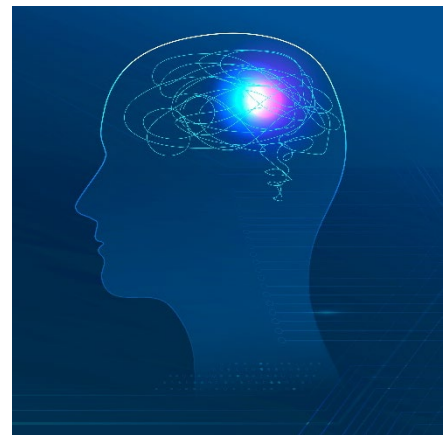
So, cancer is a disease of dysregulation because the body's natural defences have not kept it in check. Cancer is likely initiated by multiple causes and then continues to grow because multiple systems fail to catch it and destroy it in the body. There is rarely one direct cause of most people's cancer.

Another way to think about this is that cancer groups in a biological "soup," which is influenced by all sorts of factors. Cancer adapts to its environment so it can grow more quickly and easily. For example, it can encourage arteries to connect to it and feed it (angiogenesis), and it can use various hormones in the body as fuel (estrogen and progesterone). Even stress influences the cellular microenvironment.

## How Does the Mind Influence the Body?

The clearest example of the mind-body connection is the experience of stress. Stress occurs when the mind perceives a threat or a challenge in the environment that is greater than the resources to manage it. In our more primitive history, those threats were often predators looking for an easy dinner! As a result, our brains developed a complex and elegant strategy to translate a mental event (seeing a sabre-tooth tiger) into a life-protecting response. This is the Fight/Flight/Freeze model, which may be familiar to you. It is a series of bodily changes that help us fight the threat, run away from it or freeze, like a rabbit hoping the fox won't see it. Animals use the cascade of neurochemicals to fuel their reaction, but human beings are the only animals who experience the Fight/Flight/Freeze response while strapped into a seat, such as when we are driving. Let's take apart how the body reacts to perceived stress.

First, the brain must perceive and interpret an event as a threat. Stress can be caused by more than direct threats to life; a visit from your mother-in-law, a meeting with your boss, a letter from the taxation office, someone cutting you off in traffic, or a doctor's appointment can all be experienced as stressful. Notice how it requires us to interpret the event as stressful and that it depends on many factors, such as context, our personal history, baseline stress, and personality. The frontal cortex of the brain, the frontal lobes located in our foreheads, first identify and label an event as stress. This message moves like lightning to the limbic system and amygdala in the inner part of the brain, which is a more primitive part, thought of by some as the reptilian brain where fighting, fleeing, eating and making babies are initiated. This connection happens so quickly that we will not be aware of the connection, only of the feeling of fear and or anger. This part of the brain sends an urgent message to the Hypothalamus, the command centre of the Fight/Flight/Freeze reaction. From the Hypothalamus, the message continues to the Pituitary gland and then down into the Adrenal glands. A cascade of neurochemicals then floods the body, creating all the sensations we recognize as stress.



The glands respond by pumping the hormone epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) as well as other chemicals: When this happens,

- The heart beats faster than usual, pushing blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs.
- Pulse rate and blood pressure go up.
- The blood is redirected from other organs like the gastrointestinal system, and there may be a need to release the bowels and bladder
- The respiration rate increases and the small airways in the lungs open wide. This way, the lungs can take in as much oxygen as possible with each breath. Extra oxygen is sent to the brain, increasing alertness so the muscles can fight or flee
- Sight, hearing, and other senses become sharper, creating a "flashbulb" of memories that are vividly encoded in the brain
- Epinephrine triggers the release of blood sugar (glucose) and fats (cholesterol) from temporary storage sites in the body. These nutrients flood into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all body parts.



So, what are the consequences of these changes? The pressure on the coronary system increases, and blood pressure puts pressure on the arteries in the heart and brain, raising the risk of heart disease and stroke. Additionally, increased free-floating cholesterol can cause atherosclerosis or narrowing of the blood vessels. The increase in blood sugar can be implicated in diabetes and insulin dysregulation. The gastric changes can be related to increased gastric ulcers and sensitive gut. All long-term projects, such as growing bones and reproduction, are shut down because the fight for survival is more important. There are many consequences to the Fight/Flight/Freeze reaction, and it is physiologically expensive. There are also complicated

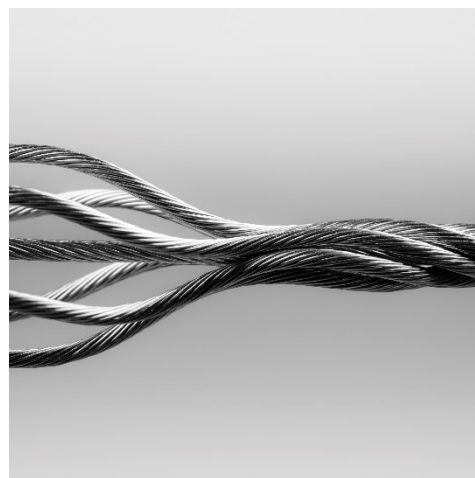
consequences for the immune system. Short-term stress, such as exercise, can enhance its function, but long-term stress can inhibit it from functioning at its best. We may have all noticed how a stressful period could leave us more susceptible to colds and flu.

### The Relaxation Response

The stress response initiates a huge physiological reaction via the sympathetic nervous system. The body, however, has an opposite mechanism to turn off the Fight/Flight/Freeze reaction: the relaxation response mediated by the parasympathetic nervous system. Initiated by using the breath and other techniques, the stress cascade can be turned down. The relaxation response can be learned, which is the focus of the first few sessions of Level One.

### Does Stress Cause Cancer?

Whether or not stress causes cancer is an age-old question that is very complicated to answer, mainly because stress is in the eye of the beholder! Good science is based on reliable and valid measurements, and stress is hard to measure. What some people experience as stressful, others do not. Take, for instance, divorce. While it can be devastating to some people, it can be experienced as a relief to others. Work stress may be a significant burden for some and exhilarating for others. Human beings are complicated and unique, so it is difficult to identify and accurately measure a universal stressor. Bereavement, for example, is often researched as a stressor, but grief is not reliably predictive of cancer. However, stress may be a factor in the progression of established cancer. Stress does cause tremendous wear and tear on the body, and learning to manage the stress response can only facilitate healing and health.



## Allostatic Load

Here is another way to understand how the body copes with the stress it undergoes. Stress comes in many forms; financial, social, personal, work-related, gender, social inequities, a history of psychological pain and many others. One way to visualize this is like a load we carry, which adds to the body's wear and tear and healing mechanisms. Imagine a knapsack that we all take with us through life. Into that knapsack, we put all the pressures in our lives. The classic components of allostatic load are financial stressors, poverty and unemployment.



Childhood experiences and beliefs about ourselves, pressures from school and judgement from others and ourselves make up much of the weight. Then society adds a more significant load, such as when people are marginalized, live in poverty or have insecure housing. The allostatic load can increase when we do not feel we have much control. It comes in the form of chronic anxiety and fear, or even anger. It can occur whether we are at the bottom of a social hierarchy or the top when we feel the pressure to perform and live up to the expectations of ourselves or others. The allostatic load can also encourage poor health behaviours such as smoking, inadequate diet, and little exercise to manage stress, which adds to the body's load.

Allostatic load has been shown to predict increased rates of heart disease, diabetes, and mental health problems.<sup>8</sup> Some suggest that allostatic load may be related to poorer long-term outcomes in cancer patients<sup>9</sup>, and some research suggests that allostatic load may be a factor in cancer onset<sup>10</sup>. As you can see, it is very complicated and hard to make clear cause-and-effect conclusions. However, reducing allostatic load and learning the relaxation response can only be helpful in the management of cancer.

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<sup>8</sup> Guidi, J., Lucente, M., Sonino, N., et al. (2021). Allostatic load and its impact on health: A systematic review. *Psychother Psychosom*, 90:11-27.

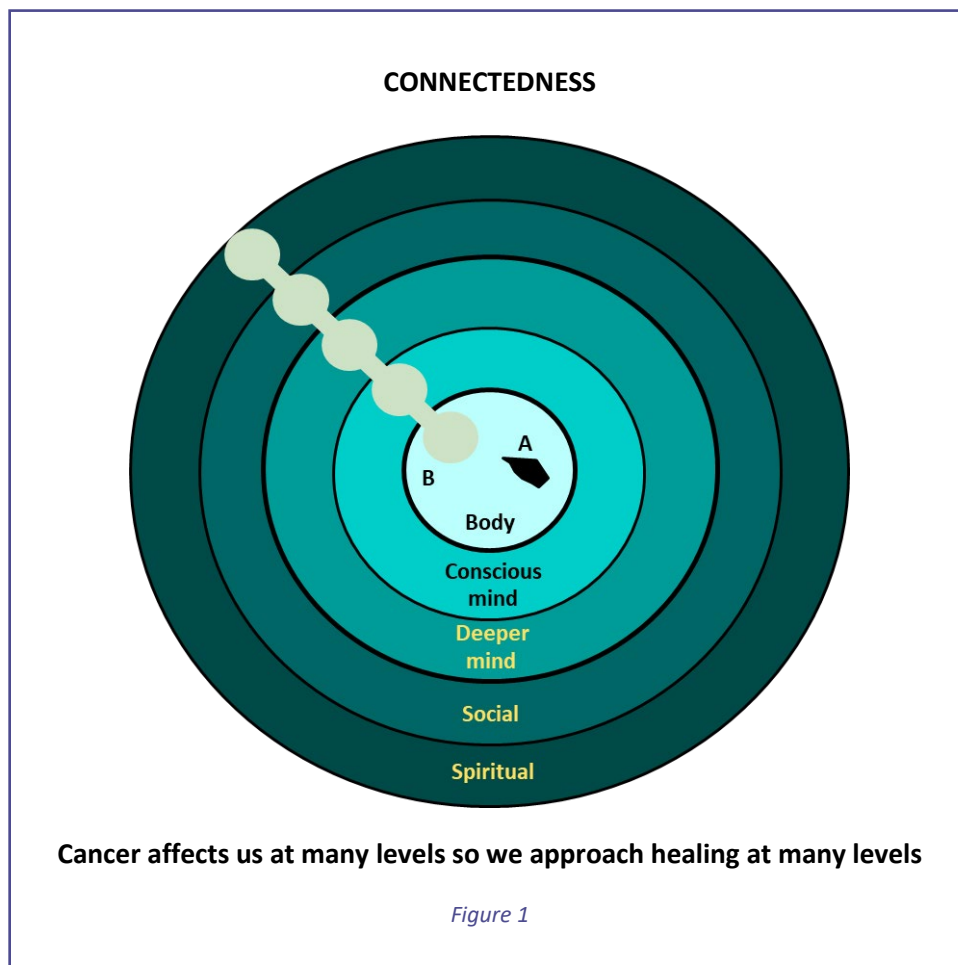
<sup>9</sup> Mathew, A., Doorenbos, A.Z., Jang, M.K. et al. (2021). Allostatic load in cancer: A systematic review and mini meta-analysis. *Biological Research for Nursing*23(3):341-61.

<sup>10</sup> Shen, J., Fuemmeler, B.F., Guan, Y. et al. (2022). Association of allostatic load and all cancer risk in the SWAN cohort. *Cancers*,14:3044.



### How Will We Help Ourselves with Cancer?

Cancer used to be considered a strictly physical event occurring in the body. However, it is now understood as an illness that affects all aspects of our lives. This diagram of concentric circles shows how we conceptualize how cancer impacts our lives (figure 1).



Cancer is, at first, a physical event with symptoms, treatment, surgeries etc. But it also influences our thoughts and evokes strong feelings of fear and other emotions. Cancer impacts our unconscious minds, affecting our ability to sleep. Suddenly our dreams are of more profound thoughts than we were aware. The experience has a significant effect on our social relationships as we work to navigate through cancer with the help of those around us. Sometimes cancer can impact who makes themselves available to us, some getting closer to us to be supportive, others moving away. Finally, there is the spiritual sphere, our understanding of who we are in the greatest sense, our ultimate purpose and meaning.

Cancer affects all these levels of our life, so we want to address each sphere. The Healing Journey Program is designed to bring each into focus for exploration and Healing.

We want to learn more about the relationship between our minds and bodies, what our thoughts do to our bodies, how we turn down the stress response and how we can turn up the relaxation response to allow our bodies to heal more effectively. We want to develop a more profound sense of peace and harmony, and while that might sound impossible in the face of cancer, sometimes these crises open us up to new learnings, priorities and ways of living.

Alastair Cunningham describes this as a state of "connectedness" between all these levels of ourselves, a state of awareness that brings with it self-care.



## Conversations with Alastair Cunningham

**Q. "Are you saying that healing is 'connectedness'?"**

A. *That's one way to look at it. While the five concentric circles or dimensions aren't separate, thinking separately about each of them helps to organize what we do.*

**Q. Are you saying something must have been wrong with me or how I've lived?**

A. *No. There is room for movement in each of us toward much more balance, harmony, and connectedness. Healing means making whole; it has been known for thousands of years that fostering harmony can profoundly heal the body.*

**Q. Is there some particular order in which we should do this work? What comes first?**

A. *You are starting on a journey, not in the geographical sense, but a journey "inside" yourself, a journey of self-understanding. Like all journeys, it happens in stages, not all at once. While everyone is different and may need to take some other actions on this journey, I have found from closely observing hundreds of people with cancer that many common features exist in people's journeys. We can lay it out as a "map" which is discussed in the next session.*

*I call the first stage, and the main subject of this workbook, "Taking Control." We talked earlier about the importance of acknowledging the serious implications of having cancer (which many people never do) and the emotions that go with this. We need to begin taking control by looking honestly at our situation. Is our life under threat? Most kinds of cancer pose a threat, although it varies significantly with the site where the cancer begins and the extent to which it has grown and spread. So, are we willing to acknowledge this threat, or do we prefer to say to ourselves, "The doctor got it all; it won't come back; it won't spread further, not in my body"? The problem with reassuring self-statements such as these is that they may prevent us from taking helpful action.*

**Q. But I need to reassure myself. If I don't, I'm afraid; sometimes, I panic. And it's not helpful to live in fear.**

A. *Of course, you don't want to live in fear. But it is possible to find a middle ground - saying to yourself, "Yes, this is dangerous, and I'm scared, even terrified, sometimes. But I am optimistic because I'll do all I can to help myself fight it." That's real but upbeat. Then, having acknowledged to yourself how you feel, it helps to talk with others about it, as we've already indicated. There will be times when each of us is scared or depressed, perhaps times when we feel angry. These feelings are a normal reaction to an overwhelming challenge. So please don't blame yourself for having them; don't just bottle them up. We don't need to protect the others around us. It's much more respectful to them to say how we truly feel. What would your reaction be if a good friend or family member felt depressed or afraid yet pretended to feel completely comfortable? If you can talk to your family, please do so. Make time when nobody is rushed. Discuss what will happen if you die; many couples never do this, but it needs to be brought out*

*into the open, and you will all feel more comfortable if you do so. Of course, a somewhat different approach may be needed with young children, but it is still helpful to be honest about what is happening. Otherwise, they may get all kinds of strange ideas, such as that they somehow "caused" your illness.*

**Q. What if my family doesn't want to hear about it?**

- A. *Sometimes people have a friend they can talk to freely. Women often do; men, less commonly. If you don't know where to turn, it's an excellent idea to attend a support group. These groups are usually small, with perhaps six to ten members. It's generally better to attend one led by an experienced professional. However, if you live far away from such services, you might try getting like-minded people together to talk. For example, you could work through a course like Healing Journey.*

*Next comes learning some simple techniques to help you cope. Three are especially helpful: relaxation, observing our thoughts, and mental imaging. We can add to this a fourth: setting goals. These are the basic bedrock techniques of self-help that we concentrate on in this introductory course.*

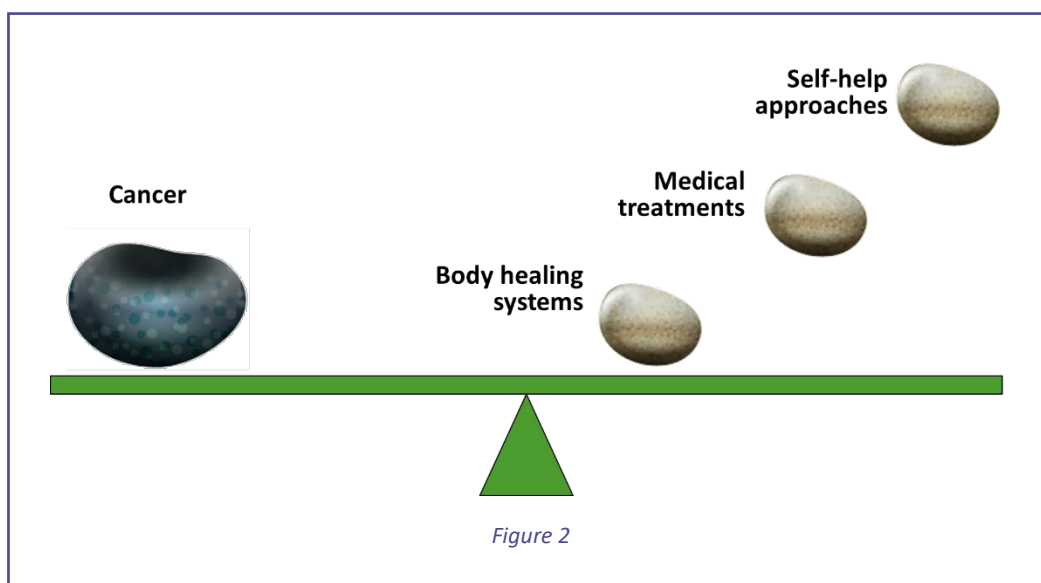
**Q. If I undertake this journey, will it heal me?**

- A. *If you go a long way on the journey, you will experience great mental, emotional, social, and spiritual healing. You may or may not affect the growth of your cancer. We have noticed that people who do this work conscientiously often fare much better than was medically expected. We've seen some individuals have remissions of advanced disease. But nobody can promise you that; what happens in cancer depends on many factors, particularly the nature of cancer itself. If it is a fast-growing kind that refuses to "listen" to the body's attempts to regulate it, then no medical or psychological treatment may affect its course. On the other hand, your cancer may be in some balance, as in figure 2. This image shows the tumour as a "weight" counterbalanced by various forces. Your self-help efforts may be enough to tip the balance in your favour.*

### It's All a Balance

Figure 2 shows a balance beam, and on the left-hand side is the weight of cancer. This weight is different for different diseases and different people. On the other side of the beam is everything you bring to bear on the disease. First is your body's healing mechanisms, such as your immune system. The second weight is medical treatment; surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and immune therapies. This weight keeps getting more significant as more treatments are developed. Finally, another weight is what you do to help yourself, like following a healthy diet and exercising appropriately.

Wellspring offers nutrition programs that focus on the needs of cancer patients as well as individualized exercise programs. Exercise, in particular, has been shown to help people do better. Finally, there are all the things that the Healing Journey will offer you, starting with learning the relaxation response. We shall be learning more about that in the next session.



### The Effects of Psychosocial Interventions on Survival from Cancer

A handful of studies demonstrate that psychosocial support programs may make a difference in the length of survival; others do not confirm this.

Alastair Cunningham and his team devised a small but intriguing study with 22 metastatic patients<sup>11 12</sup>. Patients from the Healing Journey Program joined a weekly, year-long psychotherapeutic group with interviews and homework. A panel of 14 experienced oncologists read each patient's chart and gave a survival prediction. On average, each patient's expected median survival was about one year. (It is important to remember that this study was done in the late 1990s and published in 2000. Treatments have much improved since then.) Each patient was followed closely. We took copious notes on their attitudes and behaviours, and they all provided written homework on what they were doing and thinking. We then derived a comprehensive index of how involved they became in their self-help work – how much work they did, how motivated they were, how confident they were in the techniques and their abilities, how open to change, and many other factors. We collected over 100 pages of written work from some of them!

We found that after starting the program, the one-third who became most highly involved lived much longer (about three times as long, on average) than the third who were least involved, even though oncologists expected these two subgroups to have closely similar survival times. In addition, two "highly involved" participants had complete remission of their disease. This was a small study, but the results were highly significant statistically (figure 3).

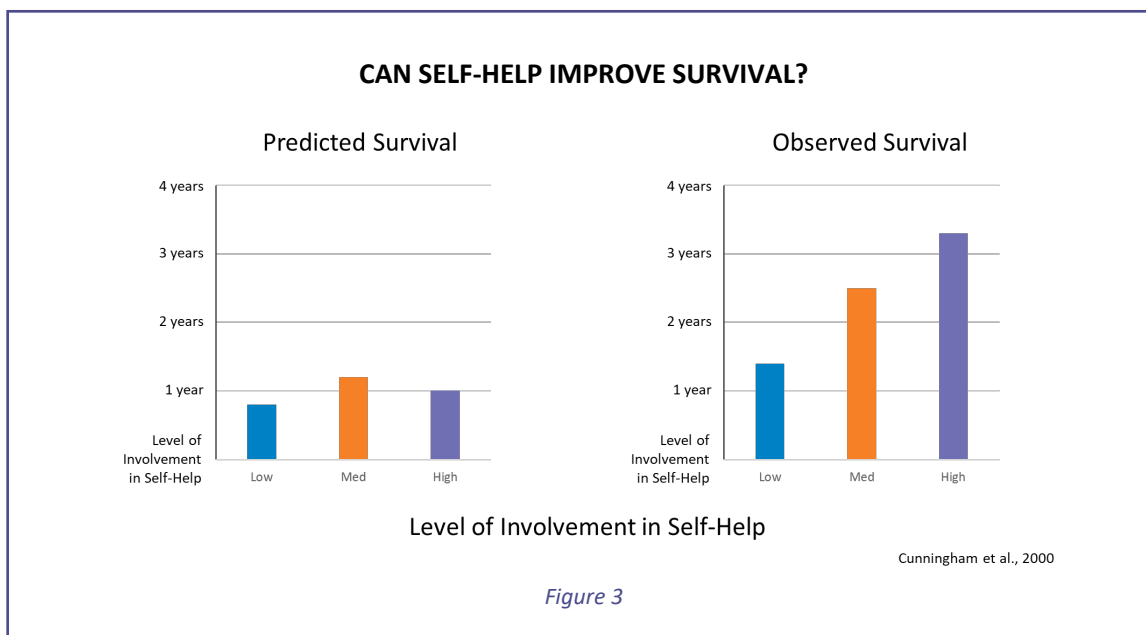


Figure 3

<sup>11</sup> Cunningham, A.J., Edmonds, C.V.I., Phillips, C. et al. (2000). A prospective, longitudinal study of the relationship of psychological work to duration of survival in patients with metastatic cancer. *Psycho-Oncology*, 9(4):323-39.

<sup>12</sup>Cunningham, A.J., Phillips, C., Lockwood, G.A. et al. (2000). Association of involvement in psychological self-regulation with longer survival in patients with metastatic cancer: An exploratory study. *Advances in Mind-body Medicine* 16(4):276-87.



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## Conversations with Alastair Cunningham

**Q: So, if I try to help myself and the cancer keeps on growing, there's no need to feel that I didn't try hard or well enough?**

*A. Yes, that's right. You can only give it your best shot. However, regardless of how these techniques may affect the disease in your body, your healing journey has the potential to heal you at the psychological and spiritual levels. We know that the Healing Journey Program improves the mood, quality of life and sense of control of people with metastatic cancer. As you move on with your journey, you will find that this is what matters. And a final word to family members of someone with cancer or another serious disease: This work is for you, too. It is our life's work, although most of us wouldn't undertake it unless severely threatened.*



## Today's Exercise

### Progressive Relaxation (Deep Muscle Relaxation)

Today we will begin exploring the process of progressive relaxation. This is not the type of relaxation we immediately think of - kicking back into a comfortable chair to watch TV at the end of a long day. Instead, it is an intentional learned process of "talking" to your body to change the stress response into a more relaxed state. Most of us are so used to being stressed or aroused that we have forgotten how to recognize it. This exercise is a process of tensing various groups of muscles and then releasing them so that you can enjoy that feeling of letting go. Soon you will begin to identify where you hold your tension and learn how to remove it.



Participate in today's exercise: [DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION](#)

Practice several times over the next week and reflect on the following questions:

Where do I tend to hold tension? Describe it below:

Face \_\_\_\_\_

Neck \_\_\_\_\_

Shoulders \_\_\_\_\_

Back (lower or upper) \_\_\_\_\_

Chest \_\_\_\_\_

Hands \_\_\_\_\_

Belly \_\_\_\_\_

Legs \_\_\_\_\_

Other places? \_\_\_\_\_





## Healing Light

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

### Making a Chart to Plan Your Healing Work

The mini-survey below indicates how "connected" we are to each of the five levels we mentioned in Figure 1. Use it to plan what needs to happen next for you to take your connection, your healing, a stage further. It has three main columns:

- one describing where you are right now;
- one saying where you would like to be;
- and a third describes one small step that can be taken right away to move you to where you want to be.

Level	Where I am	Where I would like to be	What's my first step?
Body			
Thoughts and feelings			
Deeper mind			
Social			
Spiritual			

**Notes on Session One**

## SESSION TWO

### MANAGING STRESS HEALTHY THOUGHT MANAGEMENT

#### Learning Exercise: Deep Inner Relaxation

##### Checking In

The last session introduced the ideas of stress, the Fight/Flight/Freeze response, and the Relaxation Response. The exercise of the week was to tense and relax groups of muscles in the body and to notice the difference between what tension and a relaxed muscle feel.

Reflect on your practice. How was it helpful, or if not, what happened? Were you able to practice at least three times during the week? If not, what got in the way of your self-care? There are no right or wrong answers; it's about becoming more aware of our experience and how we feel and then expressing it.

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As always, today's session begins with a breathing exercise. As we exhale, we will give the breath a sound, Om. This is a way of making the breath a larger target for our attention enhancing the breath's sensation as a soft vibration. You may have encountered this technique in yoga or meditation. It is described as the universal vibration, but however you see it, the goal is that it can help you experience the breath more deeply.

As you become more familiar with this technique, notice all the sensations of your breath and how your body responds. Then, use this technique many times a day. Some people set the alarm on their phones as a reminder to enjoy breathing.

## Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

## Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



### CENTERING MEDITATION

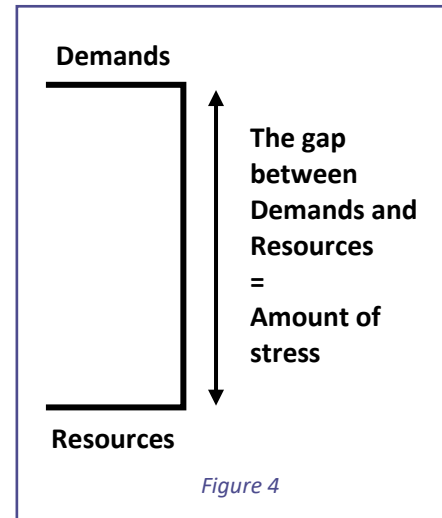
Use this technique at home, in hospital or while awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

## Let's Practice

- Make yourself comfortable in the chair; feel the support that holds you
- Soften or even close your eyes and bring your attention to the movement of your breath
- Can you feel the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils, perhaps the chill of the air on your upper lip?
- Feel the sense of the air flowing down the back of your throat into your lungs
- Can you feel the expansion as your chest opens to receive the breath?
- Feel the fullness at the height of the breath and then follow the breath out of your body. Don't rush or stop your breath quickly. Let it take its time
- Let yourself experience the breath in all its intricate details. Enjoy your breathing for a few moments
- Perhaps you notice how the rest of your body engages in the breath. Do your shoulders rise as you inhale? Can you feel them dropping down from your ears as you exhale? Let your shoulders drop down.
- Can you feel the chair supporting your back? Can you soften your weight in the chair? Perhaps at this moment, you do not need to hold yourself up, perhaps you do not need to hold up others
- Just soften and breathe, breathe, breathe . . .
- Let one of your hands rest on your belly. Can you feel your abdomen gently rising as you inhale, falling as you exhale?
- It can be subtle; there is no need to force it. It's just a gentle rise and fall, a companion to the rhythm of the breath.
- Breath by breath, you are arriving. Moment by moment, you feel like coming home
- Enjoy a few more breaths, and then very easily, gently, with soft eyes, come back to the room

## 1. Stress

We frequently talk about being stressed in our society, but it is helpful to understand stress before tackling how to manage it. Life in western culture is fast-paced and demanding. Work, family, commuting, and finances all contribute to stress. Then, add on a diagnosis of cancer. Cancer rarely happens conveniently. Other life problems do not magically resolve because you are coping with cancer. In fact, they often get worse. Stress happens when the demands around us are more significant than the resources we have to handle them. The more resources we have available, the fewer things will cause stress. So, how can we increase our resources? First, we can look outside ourselves for support. Wellspring and the Healing Journey Program are great examples of adding to the resources you bring to your situation. Asking the people in your life for support is also helpful; however, that might mean learning to ask for help. Lastly, we can add to our inner resources, such as looking after some basics, like good sleep, nutrition and exercise.



Let's look at ways we can add to the resources we bring to managing day-to-day.



Wellspring provides a wide variety of webinars at [Self-Paced Learnings on the Well on the Web](#) site. These tools are available 24/7 to help overcome the challenges of living with cancer. Webinars are categorized according to needs:

- [Coping Skills & Mediations](#)
- [Emotional Support](#)
- [Nourish Information](#)
- [General Information Webinars](#)
- [Physical Care](#)
- [Caregiver Support](#)
- [Healing & Empowerment Webinars](#)
- [Men's Speaker Series](#)
- [Pancreatic Cancer Support](#)
- [Webinars for Diverse Communities](#)

We hope you will find them helpful and informative.

### Sleep

Shakespeare said, "*Sleep that soothes away all our worries. Sleep that puts each day to rest. Sleep that relieves the weary laborer and heals hurt minds,*" meaning that being well rested helps us cope better with our concerns. Sleep is essential to healing, but a cancer diagnosis can interfere with our ability to fall and stay asleep. When life's busy distractions go quiet at night, our own fearful thoughts and feelings arise. Sometimes we fall asleep for a short while but wake around 4:00 a.m. when everything is quiet, and our minds go into overdrive with worry. One person called it "the hour of the howling wolf." Getting up in the morning after fitful sleep will leave you tired, irritable and out of sorts.

Good sleep hygiene is all the mindful practices that help us fall and stay asleep. Here are some tips:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule; go to bed at the same time each night
- Limit your exposure to screens (computer, phone, television) an hour or so before bedtime, and avoid upsetting or stimulating content
- Limit your intake of caffeine throughout the day

- Have a comfortable, quiet, dark bedroom that is not too hot or cold. If you have hot flashes due to medication, try sleeping in runner's "tech" tee shirts that do not absorb moisture, and have a fresh tee shirt near at hand should you have a night sweat
- Keep a sleep basket near the bed. In it include an app on your phone or Pad to listen to a sleep-inducing script, earphones, an eye mask, calming scent or anything else that comforts you
- Look up 'sleep hygiene' online for more good ideas, and talk about it in your group for other helpful suggestions

### Nutrition

Good nutrition can be a big challenge when you are on active treatment and feeling anxious. Asking for advice and support can help you manage protein intake (necessary for healing and recovery from surgery and chemo), intolerances (such as milk which can come up with various medications) and water intake. A consultation with the hospital dietitian can be beneficial. Wellspring also has a comprehensive Nutrition Program with a wide array of classes to help you manage.



### Exercise

While it may seem like a stretch (pun intended!), exercise has proven to be very helpful for people coping with cancer, even those in active treatment like chemotherapy. Of course, this is not the time to take up extreme sports, but gentle stretching and aerobic exercise help people cope better with side effects, and there is some evidence that it can help people with cancer survive longer<sup>(13)</sup>. Each person will have different needs and capabilities in terms of movement. Wellspring has experts who can help you develop an individualized physical movement and stretching program that meets your needs. If you recall the discussion on Fight/Flight /Freeze Response from the last session, the stress reaction in the body builds up physiological chemistry that is discharged through exercise. After all, it is what the stress response prompts you to do!

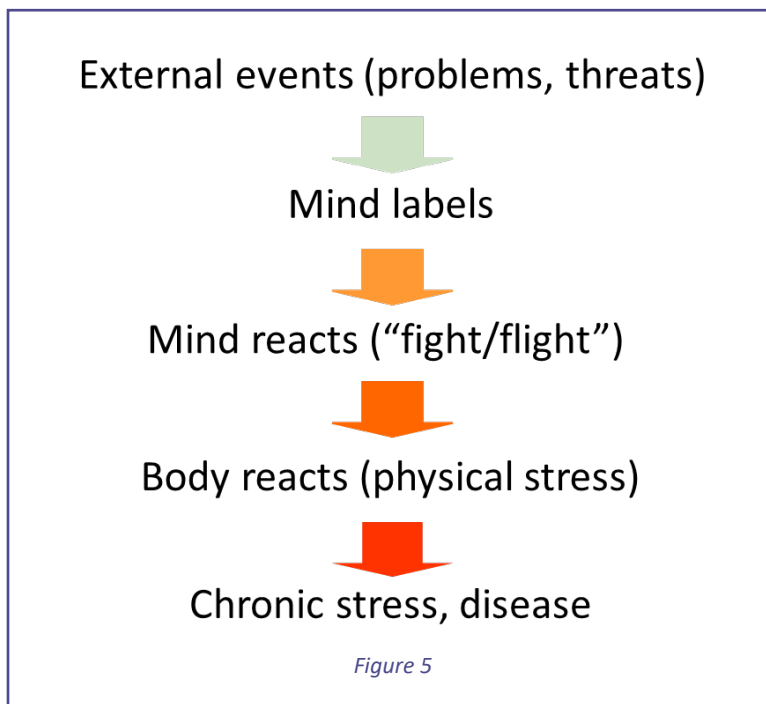


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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/expert-panel-physical-activity-helps-prevent-cancer-and-may-help-cancer-survivors-live-longer.html>

## Avoiding Stress

Below is a map that illustrates our relationship to stress:



Our first opportunity to manage stress is to reduce our exposure. Of course, there are many stressors we can't avoid, especially when coping with cancer, but it is worth considering which stressors can be reduced. For example, rushing is very stressful, and many of us believe that we can fit more into our time than is realistic. Many of us have a dishonest relationship with time, thinking we can squeeze in more activities than is possible. If being late for things is upsetting, give yourself a longer lead time, set your alarm earlier, leave sooner, and be more aware of how the traffic is behaving. Although arriving early is unlikely to be distressing, arriving late is far more uncomfortable.

Another example is learning to say "no" to requests. We may be invested in pleasing others at our own expense, and learning to say no to others is an important self-care tool. Saying yes may feel more effortless in the short run but can also build resentment over time. We all want to be considered helpful, generous and giving, but that can come with a price in terms of energy, time, and stress. Being over-extended is a common stressor, and again it is an issue of being honest about how much we can give to others, especially when you have cancer. Take a moment to consider some of the stressors that you can avoid.

**Stressors that I can avoid:**

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**Stressors I can say "no" to:**

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## 2. Healthy Thought Management

As well as addressing these basic steps in managing stress, we can work with the thoughts and feelings that create anxiety and worry and ultimately generate tension in the body.

One's mind is a busy place, a flow of interpretations, judgements, commentary, concerns, and dialogue. Some of our thoughts are helpful, but a lot of it is an ongoing rambling voice that is untamed. In the group, you will be asked to close your eyes for one minute to watch the thoughts that flow through your awareness.

Take a moment to do this throughout the week and jot down what you notice.

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Sometimes the mind is relatively clear, and if you didn't notice many thoughts, how long do you think that would last? Two minutes? Five minutes? The chatter of the mind will pick up again. How much of what you were thinking was helpful or valid? How much was factual, and how much was opinion? Were all thoughts of equal importance? We are constantly inundated with thoughts, especially when a cancer diagnosis stresses us. One participant said, "*How many times do I have to tell myself I have cancer? I know it already!*".



What can we do about the continuous thoughts going through our minds? First, we can take a deep breath and then another. Taking a deep and mindful breath is a way to "push the reset button." That's why we begin each session with a breathing exercise to help us calm the mind and focus on the session. Taking these deep and mindful breaths is an essential first step in managing the mind. Then, throughout the day, please take a few moments to enjoy some deep breaths and notice how it feels.



Below is a link to a short breathing exercise you can use to practice this strategy until you're comfortable doing it on your own.



Breathing exercise: [DEEP INNER RELAXATION](#)

Stress is a reaction to what the brain is interpreting around it. That is a big idea, and it may first sound simplistic. However, taking the example of cancer, if you had no thoughts, feelings or interpretations of the word, the diagnosis itself wouldn't create distress. We react to cancer with an intense fear response because of our experience and what we know about it. Going back to the brain, it is our first level of defence. It is the brain that interprets the world around us and tells us whether we are under threat or not. The brain uses its experience, history and context to understand what is needed in any given situation. If we interpret an event as a threat, the body will oblige us with a stress response, the Fight/Flight/Freeze response. The body doesn't do the interpreting. It does the reacting.

To appreciate the differences in how we label an event, look at the list below and mark which ones you interpret as a threat.

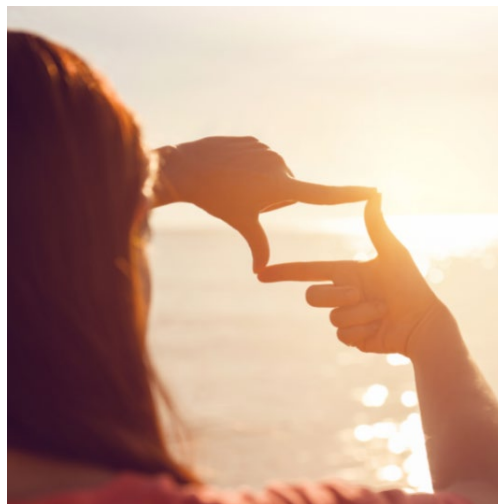
- A spider
- A snake
- Your boss
- Your mother-in-law
- A peanut
- A doctor
- A swimming pool
- A traffic jam
- Being late

There will be significant differences in how we view these things. Someone with a peanut allergy or the parent of a child with a peanut allergy will respond very differently than someone who loves peanut butter sandwiches. A swimming pool may be a wonderful thing to encounter unless you fear drowning. The point here is that the labelling of an event initiates the whole cascade of the stress response.

### Labelling an Experience

A big part of the Healing Journey is developing awareness of our thoughts and feelings. We are constantly labelling our experiences; it's sunny, so it is a good day or raining, so it's a bad day. Traffic is terrible, waiting is awful, and forgetting something is disastrous. The stress response starts with the label we give an event. What if the traffic was just heavy rather than awful? If the weather was just weather? If forgetting something is information about our state of mind rather than a wholesale condemnation?

Developing a more realistic interpretation of events is essential and prevents us from catastrophizing. Remember that the body listens to what you tell it; if you are labelling an event dramatically, the body will oblige with a stress response. We can *reframe* how we think about an event, like the difference between making a mistake and having a learning experience.



Let's look at some cancer-related examples. Doctors have learned that the labelling of an experience can shape it, so they use words like "this may pinch" or this may be uncomfortable when describing a procedure. They are trying to give you the message that this is manageable. If I say that "the chemo is killing me," I am setting myself up to interpret the treatment as a catastrophe. A different way of viewing it is that chemo is difficult, but it is helping me. The second description is much more manageable and spacious.

What is some of the language you use to describe events, and how might you reframe it?

Traffic jam \_\_\_\_\_

Forgetting something \_\_\_\_\_

Losing something around the home \_\_\_\_\_

Asking for help \_\_\_\_\_

Your cancer treatment \_\_\_\_\_

Learning how to manage our self-talk, that internal voice is a skill that develops over time. Therefore, we will be addressing it throughout the levels of the Healing Journey Program.

### A Simple Approach to Healthy Thought Management

STEP  
1

#### Acknowledge the thoughts and feelings that you are having.

- Notice and be aware of thoughts flowing through your mind.
- Tune into your mood and notice what is driving it (e.g. fear, sadness, anxiety).
- Follow the feeling to see what you think is creating the mood.

STEP  
2

#### Express the thoughts and feelings.

- Share your feelings with someone you trust who will listen
- Write them in a journal (more about this in Level Two)
- Exercise, go for a walk
- Listen to music
- Do any activity that expresses the feelings you are having

STEP  
3

#### Substitute with more helpful thoughts.

- Replace "there is nothing I can do" with "I am doing everything I can to help myself."
- "I am scared of chemotherapy" with "I can ask my medical team for help and support."
- Others?

STEP  
4

#### Repeat as often as necessary.

- This is a process you can use in many ways and many times
- Remember, there are no bad thoughts, just stuck ones

### A Note About Positive Thinking

Positive thinking is an approach to cancer in which the patient and caregiver are expected to maintain a consistently optimistic attitude (no challenge there!). It does not give space for those darker, less comfortable moments. The cancer experience is impossible without moments of fear, anxiety, sadness, and uncertainty. These feelings are normal and expected. The important thing is to notice if you are getting stuck in sad, depressed or deeply fearful feelings that you cannot rid. Professional help is available at hospitals that treat cancer patients, usually under the banner of Psychosocial Support. Seeing a professional experienced in the care of cancer patients and caregivers can give you a place to share and process your experience and have support. Sometimes medication can help maintain mood and sleep, and a mental health professional can discuss this possibility with you.



Negative thoughts are not bad. They are natural and need acknowledgement and expression to free you to feel other things, too, like pleasure, joy and peace.



## Today's Exercise

### Deep Inner Relaxation

This session's exercise focuses on producing a relaxation response in the body and the mind. This is an essential skill that will come with time and practice. You will be asked to feel sensations of warmth and heaviness through all body parts one by one, starting with the head and moving down. You may find your mind wandering as you listen, but when you notice you have fallen out of the process, bring yourself back to the voice. After relaxing the body, you will be asked to imagine a beautiful beach where you can relax. Feel free to develop an image of your safe place in your imagination. After the exercise, write about your experience, how it felt, what worked for you and what you find more challenging. Remember that this skill gets easier the more you do it.



Participate in today's exercise: [DEEP INNER RELAXATION](#)

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## Healing Light

As always, end today's session with the image of Healing Light flowing through the top of your head and filling your body. Feel yourself absorb this warmth and comfort into your body's cells. Feel how it is attracted to the parts of you that call for healing in the body, heart, mind and spirit. Then, when you are full of Light, you can send a stream of it to others in the Healing Journey and those you know who would benefit from it.

**Notes from Session Two**

## SESSION THREE

### THE DEEPER MIND: IMAGERY FOR HEALING

#### Learning Exercise: Guided Imagery

##### Checking In

Last session, we worked on healthy thought management and deep inner relaxation. Perhaps the relaxation process is getting a little easier for you, or maybe you still have challenges. Discussing it in a group will be helpful as you hear from other participants how it works for them. Again, as always, we start with a breathing exercise to clear our minds and centre ourselves for today's session.

##### Confidentiality

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##### Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

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##### CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or while awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

### Let's Practice

- Make yourself comfortable in the chair; feel the support that holds you
- Soften or even close your eyes and bring your attention to the movement of your breath
- Can you feel the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils, perhaps the chill of the air on your upper lip?
- Feel the sense of the air flowing down the back of your throat into your lungs
- Can you feel the expansion as your chest opens to receive the breath?
- Feel the fullness at the height of the breath and then follow the breath out of your body. Don't rush or stop your breath quickly. Let it take its time
- Let yourself experience the breath in all its intricate details. Enjoy your breathing for a few moments
- Perhaps you notice how the rest of your body engages in the breath. Do your shoulders rise as you inhale? Can you feel them dropping down from your ears as you exhale? Let your shoulders drop down.
- Can you feel the chair supporting your back? Can you soften your weight in the chair? Perhaps at this moment, you do not need to hold yourself up, perhaps you do not need to hold up others
- Just soften and breathe, breathe, breathe . . .
- Let one of your hands rest on your belly. Can you feel your abdomen gently rising as you inhale, falling as you exhale?
- It can be subtle; there is no need to force it. It's just a gentle rise and fall, a companion to the rhythm of the breath.
- Breath by breath, you are arriving. Moment by moment, you feel like coming home
- Enjoy a few more breaths, and then very easily, gently, with soft eyes, come back to the room



## Imagery for Healing



At the end of the Deep Inner Relaxation script, you were invited to imagine a beautiful beach where you could rest. Some of you may have conjured that image quite easily; others may not. Having a "go-to" idea of a safe place to place your mind and rest your body may take some practice. Imagery is a way in which we communicate with the body. Remember that the body does not think for itself. You tell it whether there is a threat or if you are safe. We can harness this innate skill to communicate with ourselves.

We use imagery all the time. It's a way we store memories and a way that we think. However, not all images are visual; some are physical, auditory, or even encoded as smells.

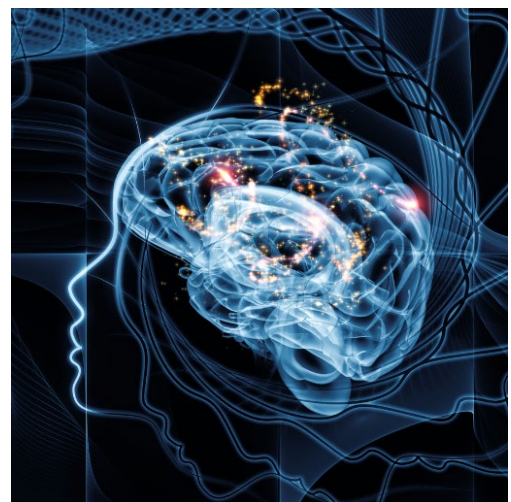
Here are some simple everyday examples:

- Where are your house keys right now?
- How would you get from your home to the nearest Wellspring?
- How many windows do you have in your home?

How did you come up with the answers? You used some form of mental representation. For example, when asked where their keys are, people often move their hands to demonstrate. They move their hands to illustrate the left and right turns if they describe how to get to someplace. They do this because they are creating a mental map in their minds. These images do not have to be precise like a photograph. For example, you might have imagined walking from room to room when counting your windows. When you misplace something, you may try to imagine where you saw it last. These are normal kinds of imagery that we use daily.

### How can we use imagery to help ourselves?

Imagery can be healing, or it can be distressing. When we worry about the future, we are conjuring some image of the future that is frightening. There are lots of images connected to the experience of cancer. Sights, sounds and smells associated with the hospital and cancer treatment can become deeply encoded in the mind. The smell of hospital sheets or alcohol wipes can evoke a blur of unpleasant memories and images and even sensations such as nausea and fear. How can we harness this powerful connection between mind and body to help us? By using guided imagery. Intentionally and with practice, we create another essential tool to help ourselves. You have already had a flavour of this with the Deep Muscle Relaxation script.



Research shows us that Guided Imagery (GI) can be a helpful intervention for a broad range of physical problems. For example:

- Hospitalized Covid-19 patients taught GI had less anxiety and pain and improved heart rate, blood pressure and blood oxygenation than controls<sup>14</sup>
- Patients taught GI have less anxiety and improved wound healing after surgery<sup>15</sup>
- GI improved nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy<sup>16</sup>
- GI is used effectively in pain management<sup>17</sup>
- GI may influence the functioning of the immune system<sup>18</sup>

Today we will use imagery to imagine the body's functioning in fighting cancer cells. This technique was developed in the 1970s by Carl Simonton, an oncologist. He asked cancer patients to visualize their immune systems fighting cancer cells, macrophages, Natural Killer cells and T cells, and he asked them to draw these interactions. These were scored for vigour and a variety of other parameters. Patients showing more vigorous engagement between their immune systems and the cancer were thought to survive longer. Although there is no controlled research to support this claim, there are benefits to imagining the immune system and the body fighting cancer.

When we learn we have cancer, there can be a significant shift in self-perception. If the cancer was found in a routine screening test and you have been experiencing no apparent symptoms, it comes as a shock, and you may suddenly see yourself and your body differently, as sick. If you were symptomatic and received the diagnosis, you may now understand your body differently and perceive yourself as changed. During treatment, you may feel like your body is out of control. With all the side effects, it can be hard to recall that there is much going right in your body. However, the body, in many ways, is functioning well.

For example, if you have had surgery, you have watched your wounds heal over time. If you are on chemotherapy, your blood counts go down within the first week as a reaction to the drugs, but they come back up and recover. If you have had radiation and felt fatigued, you will notice that your energy slowly returns over time. These are all signs of the body's resilience and ability to heal itself. Unfortunately, illness can take away that sense of empowerment, and we forget how the body manages to heal.

Imagining the immune system engaging with and overcoming cancer can remind us that the body is not powerless. But does imagery enhance immune function? Guided imagery and relaxation are hard to disentangle from each other. However, there is some evidence that imagery can improve the immune function of white blood cells. This is another opportunity to help yourself by identifying the things that your body is doing well to help you heal, along with the other self-help strategies you are using.

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<sup>14</sup> Parizad, N., Goli, R., Faraji, N. et al. 2021. Effect of guided imagery on anxiety, muscle pain, and vital signs in patients with COVID-19: A randomized controlled trial. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 43 (May)

<sup>15</sup> Broadbent, E., Kahokehr, A., Booth, R.J., et al. (2012) A brief relaxation intervention reduces stress and improves surgical wound healing response: a randomised trial. *Brain, Behav Immun*. 2012 Feb;26(2):212-7.

<sup>16</sup> Hosseini, M., Tirgari, B., Forouzi, M.A., et al. (2016). Guided imagery effects on chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting in Iranian breast cancer patients. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 25, 8-12.

<sup>17</sup> Bresler D.E. (2011). Physiological consequences of guided imagery. *Practical Pain Management*, 5(6).

<sup>18</sup> Trakhtenberg E.C. (2008). The effects of guided imagery on the immune system: a critical review. *Int J of Neuroscience*. 118:839-855.

In the group, the leader will take you through some photographs of the immune system interacting with cancer cells. These photos are taken by electron microscopes and give us precise images of what is happening at a minute level. When you have time, search 'immune cells fighting cancer' and find a collection of images you can explore.



Some of the immune cells (or include) you will see:

- Natural killer (NK) cells have crucial roles in the surveillance of cancer and viral infections. They are 'first responders' that can spontaneously recognize abnormal cells in the body and rapidly eliminate them.
- T cells destroy thousands of virus-infected cells in the body every day. These cells can also directly target and destroy cancer cells.
- Dendritic Cells digest foreign or cancerous cells and present their proteins on their surfaces, where other immune cells can better recognize and destroy the harmful cells.
- B cells release antibodies to defend against harmful, invading cells. Each B cell is programmed to make one specific type of antibody - for instance, one B cell might be responsible for producing antibodies that defend against the common cold virus. Tumour-reactive antibodies can bind to cancer cells, disrupting their activity and stimulating immune responses against them.
- Macrophages are known as the "big eaters" of the immune system. Macrophages engulf and destroy bacteria and other harmful cells. Like dendritic cells, they present antigens to other immune system cells for identification and destruction. They also clean up the debris around the cellular "neighbourhood."

These are straightforward descriptions of a very complex system, but it is a way to appreciate how active the body is in defending you against cancer.

In the imagery exercise you are asked to imagine your immune cells – either clearly, like the photographs above, or you can imagine something symbolic, like animals or some mechanism that can clean and protect your body. Your imagery doesn't have to make sense to other people. When you imagine the cancer, you can think of something broken, confused, and ineffective. Remember that cancer cells are damaged and not functioning as they were meant to. Imagine your immune system as a swift, effective form of your body's intelligence. Now add the treatment you are on or have had and imagine how it is helping to fight the cancer. Then bring into your image all the other things helping you, such as what you are learning in the Healing Journey, people who support you, and even the Light image we use at the end of each session. If you do not have cancer because it has been treated, imagine your immune system on alert and protecting you should it arise again.

Will it be upsetting to imagine your cancer? Perhaps, but this allows you to work with healthy thought management. First, identify the thoughts and feelings that come up, express them, maybe draw them or write about them, then replace those thoughts with something healing like, "cancer cells are broken, and my body is strong," or "there are lots of things I am doing to help myself."



## Conversations with Alastair Cunningham

### **Q. How do I start?**

- A. *Sit with your eyes closed in a comfortable reclining chair. There is no limit to the number of images you can or should devise. However, each needs to feel powerful and believable to you. Be sure to try to match the defence symbols to the cancer symbols and ensure the defences can prevail over their targets. It would be best if you tried to set up a regular or twice-daily practice of relaxation and imagery.*

### **Q. Does it matter if you don't see pictures in mind clearly?**

- A. *Many people don't, and that doesn't seem to matter. However, you may find that they are sometimes clearer than others. Sometimes, the more relaxed we are, the better we see images.*

### **Q. I'm unsure if my images come from my mind spontaneously or if I am 'putting' them there.**

- A. *This can be a concern at first. One way to think about it is to see the mind as having many levels. We have talked about only two main divisions, the conscious mind, and the deeper mind, but there are probably many corresponding to layers or areas of nerve tissue. As you become more familiar with watching your mind, you will find that some thoughts and images come from a relatively "superficial" place—that is, you are controlling what you see with your will. In contrast, other images "well up" themselves, as they do in dreams. As you work on your imagery, you will encounter images about which you have a strong inner feeling (intuition). Trust those intuitions and shape your imagery accordingly.*

### **Q. Are there other uses for mental imagery?**

- A. *There are many purposes for which mental imagery is valuable. We've used it for relaxation (imagining being on a beach or in some other pleasant place) and trying to direct our body's Healing. We have alluded to how drawings can show us better than words what issues may be important to us. You might also experiment to help you take fear out of situations like going for a check-up or treatment. Rehearse the event in your imagination a few times in the days before going to the hospital. See yourself and everyone else surrounded in light, calm and healthy. This kind of imaging positively affects healing, such as reducing the post-operative time patients need to spend in the hospital. I've used it myself before surgery and ahead of unpleasant procedures, like colonoscopies, with beneficial results. Imagining a calm sea (or other images evoking calmness) can diminish nausea and pain. Imagery can also give us an "intermediary" between ourselves and a spiritual figure, like Jesus or the Buddha. Imagining such a figure, if we believe in it, can promote communication at the spiritual level. Like everything else, it takes practice, and people have different levels of natural aptitude. It's up to you now to begin exploring this important healing mode. Muster as much conviction and intensity as you can!*

**Q. It feels like this healing is becoming a full-time job?**

*A. It can be, at least for a time. But isn't that what you would expect if the task is to change long-standing habits in many areas? Is your life worth it?*



## Today's Exercise

### Guided Imagery

Listen to this week's audiotape. Take a moment afterwards to reflect on your experience. Drawing it out would allow you to work with this image. Add your drawings and reflections below. We will talk more about this in Level Two.



Participate in the Guided Imagery exercise, entitled: [IMAGERY FOR HEALING](#)



## Healing Light

Finish today's session as usual, with the Healing Light flooding through you, body, heart, mind and spirit. See it surrounding you with protection and care. Then send a stream of this Light to anyone who might benefit from Light today.

**Notes on Session Three**

## SESSION FOUR

### SOCIAL SUPPORT SPIRITUAL SUPPORT SETTING GOALS

#### Learning Exercise: Imagining an Ideal Day in the Future

##### Checking In

We are now at the last session of Level One. Over the past three weeks, we have covered a lot of ground! Below is the list of the critical skills we have covered, and this last session is an opportunity to ask questions and explore the techniques with your group leader and other participants. But, of course, this is just the beginning of the Healing Journey, and today we will all discuss how to maintain your self-care until the beginning of Level Two and what the rest of the levels of the Healing Journey Program can offer you.

As always, we begin with the breath, a centering exercise to help you release tension. This a helpful skill to do on your own, like a mini relaxation that you can pull out of your back pocket whenever you need it.

##### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

##### Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



##### CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or while awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.



**Let's Practice**

- Make yourself comfortable in the chair; feel the support that holds you
- Soften or even close your eyes and bring your attention to the movement of your breath
- Can you feel the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils, perhaps the chill of the air on your upper lip?
- Feel the sense of the air flowing down the back of your throat into your lungs
- Can you feel the expansion as your chest opens to receive the breath?
- Feel the fullness at the height of the breath and then follow the breath out of your body. Don't rush or stop your breath quickly. Let it take its time
- Let yourself experience the breath in all its intricate details. Enjoy your breathing for a few moments
- Perhaps you notice how the rest of your body engages in the breath. Do your shoulders rise as you inhale? Can you feel them dropping down from your ears as you exhale? Let your shoulders drop down.
- Can you feel the chair supporting your back? Can you soften your weight in the chair? Perhaps at this moment, you do not need to hold yourself up, perhaps you do not need to hold up others
- Just soften and breathe, breathe, breathe . . .
- Let one of your hands rest on your belly. Can you feel your abdomen gently rising as you inhale, falling as you exhale?
- It can be subtle; there is no need to force it. It's just a gentle rise and fall, a companion to the rhythm of the breath.
- Breath by breath, you are arriving. Moment by moment, you feel like coming home
- Enjoy a few more breaths, and then very easily, gently, with soft eyes, come back to the room

Here is a list of the skills we have covered in Level One. On the following scale, rate your confidence in using each of these skills to help yourself cope:

- 1 not confident
- 2 somewhat confident
- 3 moderately confident
- 4 confident
- 5 very confident

**Session One**

- \_\_\_ Centring and focusing with the breath
- \_\_\_ Identifying feelings
- \_\_\_ Progressive Relaxation (tensing and releasing muscles)
- \_\_\_ Imagining a safe place

**Session Two**

- \_\_\_ Developing a sleep routine
- \_\_\_ Managing nutrition
- \_\_\_ Exercising while respecting your physical limits
- \_\_\_ Watching your thoughts and writing them down

- \_\_\_ Expressing feelings
- \_\_\_ Replacing uncomfortable thoughts
- \_\_\_ Deep Inner Relaxation

**Session Three**

- \_\_\_ A healing image of your immune system protecting you
- \_\_\_ An image (or images) of all that you are doing to help yourself
- \_\_\_ Healing Light Imagery

This is not a test but rather a guide to support you in asking questions in your group and to help you focus on where you still need work.

Record any questions you have for your group here:

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## 1. Social Support

Receiving the social support that you need can be challenging. It may be helpful to break it down into smaller pieces. We can think of support as coming in two different styles; emotional and practical. Both are important, and people usually specialize in one or the other. Here are some examples of practical support:

- Cutting the lawn
- Picking up some groceries
- Walking the dog
- Offering drives to hospital appointments
- Volunteering to make meals
- Picking the kids up after school



The people who offer these things are usually "doers," good at anticipating practical needs and stepping in when they see where they can help. They are less likely to be comfortable talking about feelings. Some people do these activities without being asked, and others need prompting.

Emotional support looks a little different.

- Asking how you are doing and listening to your response without contradicting you
- Offering to come and visit over a cup of tea or coffee
- Going for walks
- Spending time with you watching a movie
- Listening, then listening some more, without judgement



This last one is especially rare in our world because people are busy, and they underestimate the value of listening. Sometimes people are scared to listen because of what they might hear. They don't want to see you upset. In fact, they may shut down communication for fear they will also upset you and themselves!



At Wellspring, there are peer support volunteers for both patients and caregivers. These people have had (or have) cancer or cared for someone with cancer. They have been specially trained to listen to and support other people going through the experience. They can also help you decide what programs at Wellspring might help you. This kind of non-judgemental listening can help you identify your thoughts and feelings and be a place to say things on your mind in a safe, confidential environment.

We can feel disappointed at the shift in our relationships during the cancer experience. Some old friends and family members may not make themselves available to you. It is not uncommon. Because of their fears or experiences with cancer, they may not be able to support you in the way you need. But, on the other hand, sometimes, people you didn't expect will step up and be there for you in ways you might not have predicted. Sometimes people need directions as to what you need from them. For example, it is okay to say, "I just need to talk, to say things out loud. You don't need to tell me I'm going to be okay or try to fix it. Just listening to me helps".

### Tips on Managing Support:

- Ask for what you need; be specific, and time-limited:
  - Could you please drive me to my doctor's appointment next Monday at 3:00?
  - When you go to the grocery store, can you please pick up some milk and eggs?
- Let people know that you appreciate their help and that they are getting it right:
  - Keep a pack of small thank you notes at hand to write a very brief letter to people who have stepped forward
  - Let them know via email, phone call, or message that you appreciate their help
- Ask a friend to organize others for you, create a schedule of various needs (drives to appointments, lawn cutting, even meals) and let them contact and manage others for you
- If a friend asks you what they can do to help, take them up on it! Even if you can't think of anything at the moment, tell them that you will get back to them later, and thank them for their offer of support

Remember, asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength. Also, know that people want to be helpful because it makes them feel good and decreases their hopelessness. Remember your own experiences of helping others and how that made you feel.





## Conversations with Alastair Cunningham

**Q. I suppose I could cultivate relationships with people who seem able to be supportive, but the reality is that with this cancer, I have to depend on my current family and friends. One or two of them can listen, but others don't want to hear about my disease because it makes them anxious.**

A. Perhaps you can discuss what you need with those whom you want to be more supportive? For example, if your spouse seems to want to pretend that nothing serious is happening to you, can you tell him/her that you need to be open and honest about it? Of course, you don't want to dwell on it all the time; but you both must acknowledge reality. For example, if your life is in danger, you will want to express how you feel about that and talk about what the survivor will do if you die.

**Q. That's hard; we both get so upset. I'm afraid that if I start expressing my feelings, I may cry and never stop or begin to rant and rave uncontrollably.**

A. I think you'll find that that doesn't happen. Crying seems to have a natural course and comes to an end with relief. Nevertheless, it's regrettable to see two people avoiding true emotional expression, caught up in an elaborate dance of pretence about the implications of an illness.

**Q. What about my children? Should I tell them? They would be so devastated if they knew that I might die!**

A. It is particularly hard with children, but honest communication is the best course. You will need to be extremely gentle and gradual in what you tell them, e.g. that you have an illness, that the doctors are doing all they can for it, and that you are going to be quite all right for the next little while, but that you might become sicker in the future. When they have become used to these ideas, and at the right moment, you might introduce the notion that you could die. Always convey that you love them very much and want to be with them as much as possible. They need to know the truth because they may get distorted ideas if you conceal it from them, such as that your illness is their fault or that you are at risk of dying any day.



Wellspring FAMILY RESOURCES provide help with conversations with children.

List Below Any Additional Ideas You May Think of for Managing Your Support Team

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## 2. Spirituality Support

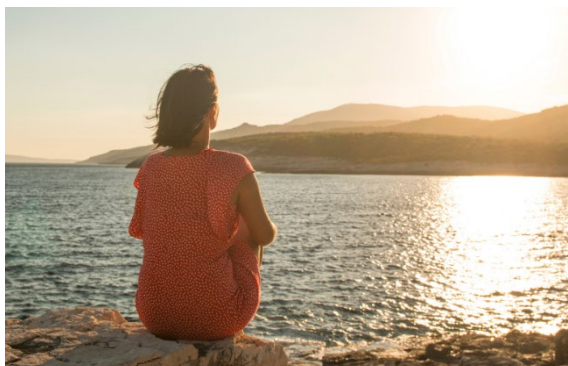
The topic of spirituality may at first feel uncomfortable. As someone once said, it is never a good sign when you are sick, and they send the clergy to visit! Amid the stress of a cancer diagnosis and managing treatment, issues of spirituality may not come to mind, and for others, spirituality is an integral part of their lives.

Spirituality differs from religion. (This will be discussed in greater depth in Levels Two and Three of the Healing Journey.) Your religion may be a great source of support and strength for you, or you may be ambivalent about the religion. In Level One, we want to think about spirituality in terms of what gives you peace, and what 'feeds your spirit.' Sometimes in the middle of cancer, the idea of peace may seem impossible or irrelevant, but it is the ultimate Relaxation Response! Feelings of peace tell the body that you are safe. It calms the busy mind and gives you a meaningful break from your ongoing challenges.

Peacefulness may come from traditional religious practices like prayer, attending services, or reading spiritual texts. For others, peace comes from different sources, activities that are calming.

Here is a list of possibilities:

- Walking, preferably in nature
- Sitting in a garden or viewing through a window
- Listening to calming music
- Being with people you love
- Helping others, listening to others
- Being with a pet
- The imagery of healing places
- Deep breathing



Over your experience of the Healing Journey's levels, your list of spiritual activities will likely expand. Make a list of the experiences that give you peace and 'feed your spirit':

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### Spiritual Meaning of Cancer

Many people ask, "why me" when diagnosed with cancer. Sometimes, a cause can be discerned and remedied in the present, but most often, it is a mystery or a slew of different factors that cause cancer. Although some people respond with "why not me?" one look around the clinic waiting rooms will often show us that many people deal with cancer. Perhaps the more helpful question is, "does this cancer have meaning?" In no way is this a suggestion that cancer is a gift; if it is, it is wrapped in barbed wire! Instead, does this cancer experience offer me a chance to re-examine my life and what I care about? Are my priorities the same now as they were before the diagnosis? These are questions that are integral to the Healing Journey.



## Conversations with Alastair Cunningham

### **Q. How do I begin to understand spirituality?**

- A. *If the subject is new to you, I'd like to offer a few remarks here to get you thinking. My book [Bringing Spirituality into Your Healing Journey](#) discusses, in much more detail, how spirituality and healing are related. It is illustrated with many quotes from our cancer patients who have adopted a spiritual search as part of their healing process. Spiritual does not mean the same as religious. The spiritual realm or dimension refers to an order, or intelligence, that transcends even the visible world. There are many names for this: God, the One, the Universal Source, Brahman, the Absolute, and so on. Many people don't believe such an order exists, but skepticism fades as you gain experience. Religions are any codified system of faith and worship whose purpose is to remind us of this order; they may or may not encourage spiritual exploration in individuals. You can be spiritual without being religious and adopt a religious set of beliefs or rituals without being spiritually connected (although, of course, world religions have generally arisen out of the profound spiritual experiences of their founders). There have been great saints and sages in many religions. Men and women who have been so strongly connected to their spiritual essence as to have become godlike. Jesus Christ is perhaps most familiar to us in the West, but there are such figures in other religions. They are sometimes worshipped as an embodiment of God because, for most of us, it is easier to think of a person or human figure than an abstraction.*

*If people are connected with a religion, I advise them to work within it and to attempt to deepen their understanding and experience using the symbols and traditions of that religion. If somebody is Christian, for example, they might read the works describing the direct spiritual experience of historical figures within that tradition, and there are many of them: St Augustine, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila, for example, and more modern writers such as; Evelyn Underhill, John Main, Mathew Fox, Thomas Merton, Joel Goldstein, and many others. You may find that your local minister, imam, venerable, rabbi or priest can help guide you. If you do not think of yourself as religious, then I would advocate beginning some serious reading about spirituality in whatever traditions interest you. Start with a book or two providing an overview, and then delve more deeply into original sources.*

### **Q. Why is this necessary? Isn't it enough to go to church and pray for help from God?**

- A. *That more automatic observance may have value, but we are concerned with intensifying your experience and connection at all the levels I've mentioned. As an analogy, think about social connectedness: We all know that it is possible to go through the motions with other people, not getting involved. Contrast that with the intensity of a love affair. That is the difference between mechanical observance of religious rituals and an intense relationship with our spiritual self or God. The intense connection with your body and mind, with supportive others, and with the spiritual offers the best chance of re-harmonizing your whole being and promoting healing.*

*As understanding grows, the healing work becomes more a matter of personal psychological and spiritual growth. It becomes less necessary to be with others who have cancer and more important to*

*study with those who are serious about change. You might explore groups doing yoga or tai chi, for example. Individual psychotherapy can help most people; don't be afraid to shop around until you find someone you like interested in self-help for healing. For spiritual work, you can look for meditation groups in many traditions—Buddhism, Sufism, and Christianity, for example. Again, experiment until you find a good personal fit. If you are trying to decide whether a given teacher will be helpful, look beyond any charisma and find out whether they demonstrate the principles they espouse in their own lives. Any assistance involving large sums of money is suspect, no matter how famous the names of those offering.*

*Finally, the healing process is about connecting with something larger than oneself. Better social relationships are one kind of improved connection, but the ultimate, in my view, is to experience the spiritual reality underlying this material one. Psychological work is needed mainly to clear away the blocks to this kind of connection.*

*I hope you will find ways to uncover your own 'true nature' and thus learn to be more accepting of whatever is happening to you and enjoy a better, perhaps longer, life.*





## Today's Exercise

### Imagining Your Perfect Day

What would it be like to have a perfect day with no appointments, demands, or pressures? This week's exercise is imagining an ideal day in the future. Cancer is such an all-consuming experience that it can be challenging to recall the things that give us joy and peace. This exercise is an opportunity to explore that. Imagine having a full day to yourself, wherever you want to be, with no demands or appointments and perhaps no phones or computers! Take some time to write about this and use it as a guide to bring a few things into your life that give you pleasure. Let your imagination go free as you listen to this week mp3.



Participate in the Imagining Your Perfect Day exercise, entitled: [A PERFECT DAY IN THE FUTURE](#)

Write some of your reflections below:

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## Healing Light

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

### Where do we go from here?

Hopefully, you are already considering Level Two of the Healing Journey as your next step. This is a good time to look back through this workbook and read the thoughts, feelings, and goals you have recorded here.

- Have you noticed a shift in your experience?
- Are you feeling better able to cope with day-to-day life?
- Are you using the skills that you are learning regularly?
- What stands in your way if you are not using them as often as you would like?

It is important to identify the things that inhibit you from practicing relaxation. For example, our handheld electronics have an infinite ability to draw our attention. Take a moment to notice your screen time. How much of it supports your Healing? How much of that time is spent as a distraction from your feelings? Screen time can create a profound sense of inertia, or 'couch paralysis.' We can get drawn in deeper and deeper as each video melds into the next one. Cancer is an invitation to make decisions about our priorities and to identify what really matters to us.

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**Notes on Session Four**

## APPENDIX I

### THE HEALING JOURNEY PATH

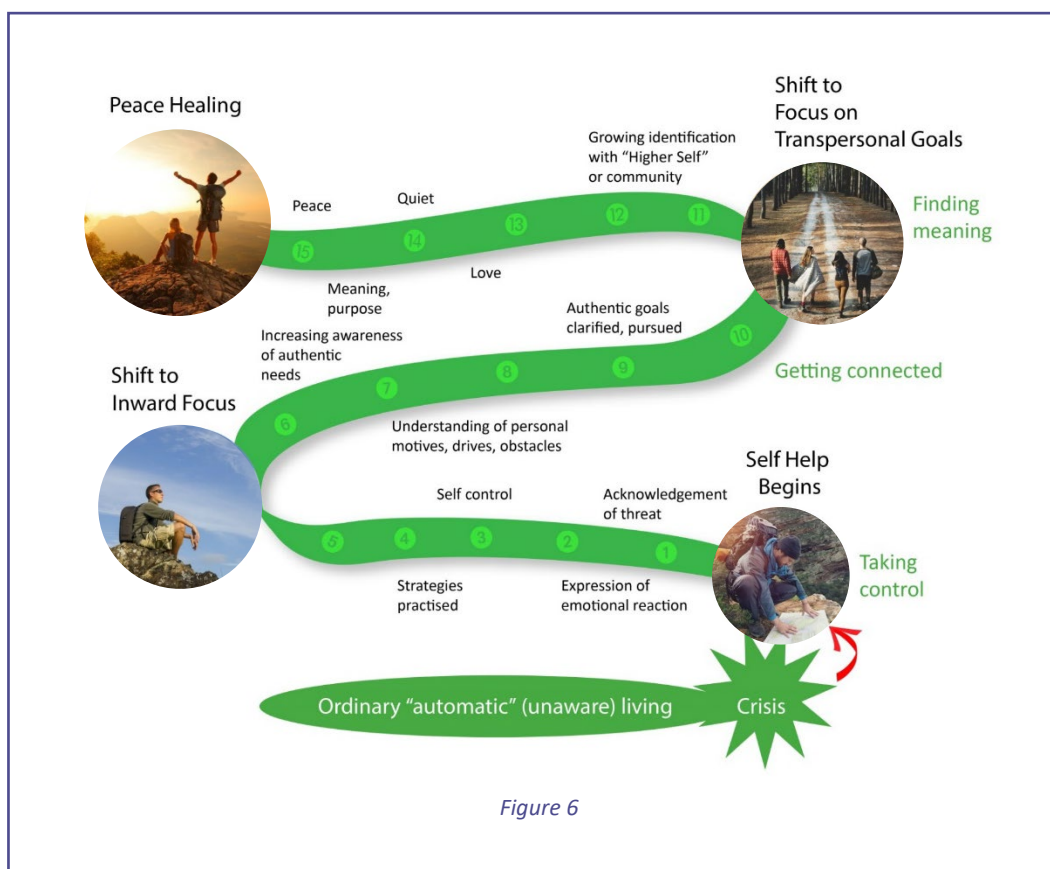


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows the path ahead if we decide to take a 'healing journey.' The bottom loop represents how most of us operate when life is going reasonably well: There seems to be no reason to change, so we stick with our old habits. However, a crisis, whether a cancer diagnosis or something else equally alarming, can induce us to look closely at our lives and consider what might be changed. Many people avoid this step. It is not well understood in our culture and then slide back into the familiar loop again. It is easier to deny the seriousness of the situation, leave it for others (doctors or proponents of alternative remedies) to fix, and hope that everything will return to a pre-crisis state.

Others decide to use the threat as a stimulus to personal growth and begin to ascend the first 'leg' of the journey, which involves acknowledging the threat, expressing the emotions generated, then learning some self-control strategies. In this course, we are introducing basic methods to get there - relaxation, mind-watching, imaging, and goal-setting. But many variants exist.

The second part of this journey - '**Getting Connected**' - focuses more on understanding how your mind works and getting to know the old patterns, some of which hold you back. The present course can help you get started with this, but it is also valuable to consult professional counsellors, or therapists, to do more work of this kind.

The third part of the program, '**Finding Meaning**,' is about connecting with some order, purpose, or dimension that is bigger than we are; it's discovering how we fit in and what purpose our lives have. Through such spiritual work, we eventually find that the search for meaning in cancer is a quest for meaning in life itself.

The fourth part of the program '**Authenticity, Autonomy and Acceptance**' is about incorporating all the skills you have learned into your daily life. It doesn't add new skills but deepens the things you have already learned. The work aims to understand what authenticity, autonomy and acceptance would mean in your life and then to pursue it.

The fifth part of the program pulls together what you have learned through the teachings of Eckhart Tolle and his book '*The New Earth*.' We look at these ideas through the lens of cancer and connect them with the skills you have learned through the program.

And onward...