

Self-Care and Lymphoma

OVERVIEW

When you or someone you love receives a diagnosis of lymphoma or chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL), life often becomes flooded with various appointments, blood tests and side effects. The management of your diagnosis and treatment is the ultimate priority, but it is also essential that you take time out to care for your body and mind.

There is an overwhelming amount of research which recognises the positive impact of self-care on wellbeing at every point in the cancer experience, from diagnosis to survivorship. The evidence also suggests that people with lymphoma who take time for self-care report reduced levels of stress, anxiety, pain, nausea and fatigue without medicinal input.

The following fact sheet will define and identify self-care activities, as well as provide some practical tips and strategies on how to implement these into daily life.

WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Commonly, we refer to self-care as activities that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Self-care can look and feel different for each person, but we can tell whether an activity is a form of self-care if it refuels us, rather than takes away from us. Self-care is not selfish, but more about listening to the needs of our mind and body and understanding what we need in order to cope with our day to day life.

When we consider the additional stress which a diagnosis of lymphoma or CLL can place on our lives, it is realistic to consider that we may need to create extra time for self-care activities in order to cope. It is also important that carers of people with lymphoma regularly take time for self-care. For more information on this, see the 'Caring for someone with lymphoma' fact sheet via the Lymphoma Australia website: [engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_C4SwLorCLL_FactSheet_FA\(web\).pdf](http://engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_C4SwLorCLL_FactSheet_FA(web).pdf)

SELF-CARE FOR THE MIND

Many people experience a wide range of emotions following a diagnosis of lymphoma or CLL including sadness, fear, anxiety

and anger. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and there is also no normal timeline your emotional experience must follow. Often, people describe their emotions during treatment as variable and changing every day. Medications such as steroids may also impact your emotional wellbeing during treatment, at times making you feel more emotional or tearful.

Creating time to look after your mind and manage your emotions is as important during your experience as looking after your body and managing side effects. The first step in this process is acknowledging your feelings and emotions and talking about them openly with someone you know will listen to you without judgement. Some strategies for practicing self-care of your mind can include:

- Giving yourself permission to experience your emotions as they arise, including taking time to cry if you feel you need to
- Discussing your emotional concerns with your nurse, GP, treating team – remembering that they are just as important as your physical concerns
- Keeping a diary or journal during treatment documenting your emotions, thoughts and feelings each day
- Asking for a referral to a counsellor, psychologist, social worker or spiritual care worker to discuss your emotional concerns on a regular basis
- Continuing enjoyable hobbies, or taking up new, relaxing hobbies for example swimming, craft groups or meditation classes
- Joining the private Facebook support group for people with lymphoma or CLL 'Lymphoma Down Under' and connecting with others in similar situations
- Learning to meditate and practice mindfulness. There are many free smartphone apps for this, or you can look into whether there are some meditation groups in your local area
- Making time for socialising with friends or family members

SELF-CARE FOR THE BODY

Self-care activities for your body have the two-fold effect of taking care of your physical and mental health. For example, there is a lot of evidence which promotes regular exercise during treatment for managing side effects and creating better treatment outcomes, but there is also substantial evidence

FACT SHEET

which supports exercise for stress reduction and mood stabilisation. For more information, view the 'Exercise and Lymphoma' fact sheet on the Lymphoma Australia website: [engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_Exercise_FactSheet_FA\(web\).pdf](http://engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_Exercise_FactSheet_FA(web).pdf)

Some other examples of self-care for your body include:

- Making healthy food choices and including more fresh fruits and vegetables. Ask for a referral to a dietitian if you aren't sure about what your dietary requirements are
- Listening to your body and understanding when it needs rest and when it needs activity. Keeping a journal or diary can greatly assist with this strategy
- Regularly setting aside time for safe complementary therapies such as massage, acupuncture or reflexology (for more information see the 'Complementary and Alternative Therapies and Lymphoma' fact sheet)
- Creating a sleep schedule and allowing time for rest and relaxation (for more information, see the 'Sleep Management & Lymphoma' fact sheet on the Lymphoma Australia website: [engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_SMSleep_FactSheet_FA\(web\).pdf](http://engonetlymaus.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Fact%20Sheets/LYA084_SMSleep_FactSheet_FA(web).pdf))

It is important to note that what is self-care for one person, may not be helpful for another. While for one person, self-care may mean putting on make-up and nice clothes and leaving the house for a coffee, for another it may mean cancelling plans to go out and spending time at home watching movies instead.

The first step to take when creating a self-care routine is listening to your own body and acknowledging your unique needs. Start small and try different things to know what works for you. Like everything in life, self-care takes practice.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Organisation	How can they help?
Lymphoma Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymphoma Australia offers a wide variety of resources and support for people with lymphoma or CLL and their carers. Please visit our website for further information: lymphoma.org.au • Lymphoma Australia Fact sheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise and Lymphoma • Sleep management and Lymphoma • Fatigue and Lymphoma • Complementary Therapies and Lymphoma

Organisation	How can they help?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Impact of Lymphoma • Caring for someone with Lymphoma • lymphoma.org.au/page/1218/fact-sheets • Lymphoma Australia YouTube Channel to watch presentations about a variety of topics including lymphoma subtypes, management and supportive care: youtube.com/user/LymphomaAustralia • Lymphoma Nurse Support Line: 1800 953 081 or email: nurse@lymphoma.org.au • Online private Facebook group: 'Lymphoma Down Under' for support from other patients & carers: http://bit.ly/2mrPA1k
Avaana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avaana is Australia's dedicated wellbeing marketplace. Created for Australians with cancer to find, connect, and book, in real-time, appointments with expert health, fitness and wellbeing practitioners who can support them on their cancer journey. Visit the website for more information: avaana.com.au/
The Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre (ACSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ACSC is a unique service based at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Victoria. It provides a comprehensive collection of resources and information for cancer survivors and their carers: petermac.org/services/support-services/australian-cancer-survivorship-centre
Beyond Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond Blue provide phone, online and email support for those experiencing high levels of depression, anxiety, stress or suicidal thoughts. Call 1300 22 4636 or visit: beyondblue.org.au
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm is a free smartphone app which contains over 100 guided meditations for anxiety, stress and sleep management. From beginners to advanced listeners. Visit: calm.com
Cancer Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer Council offers a range of services to support people affected by cancer, their families and friends. Services may vary depending on where you live. Visit: cancer.org.au or call 13 11 20

FACT SHEET

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CanTeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CanTeen is an organisation working with young people affected by cancer 12-25 years. They have online support chat rooms, phone and face to face counselling as well as fun events and camps. They also have an online support group for parents. canteen.org.au or email support@canteen.org.au or call 1800 835 932
Gather My Crew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather My Crew connects people going through tough times with friends and family who want to provide practical help: gathermycrew.org.au
Headspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone and face-to-face counselling for those affected by mental health issues aged between 12-24 years. Call: 1800 650 890
Leukaemia Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leukaemia Foundation provide support groups, accommodation and transport assistance for people living with blood cancers and their carers: leukaemia.org.au
Lifeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia-wide 24-hour telephone crisis support and counselling for those in crisis or need of support. Call 13 11 14 (24/7)
MensLine Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telephone counselling service for men specialising in relationships, domestic violence, mental health, wellbeing and discussion forums. Call: 1300 78 99 78
Redkite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RedKite provides essential support to children, young people and their family/ friends from cancer diagnosis, treatment and after treatment aged 0-25 years. redkite.org.au or email support@redkite.org.au or call 1800 REDKITE (1800 733 548)
WeCan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WeCan is an Australian supportive care website to help people affected by cancer find the information, resources and support services they may need following a diagnosis of cancer. Visit: wecan.org.au

This resource was last reviewed and updated December 2019