

# Learning about Burnout

Information for people living with cancer and  
their family caregivers

## The EPEC™ Project

This brochure was produced by  
The EPEC Project at Northwestern University.

Thanks to The Lance Armstrong Foundation  
for their generous support.

**LIVESTRONG**  
LANCE ARMSTRONG FOUNDATION



## What is Burnout?

Burnout is the feeling of lasting physical, mental or emotional exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands.

Burnout may affect:

- ▶ People living with cancer
- ▶ Family, friends, and loved ones

The stress of having cancer, or of being close to someone who does, can wear you down. Changes in the family dynamic, complicated or distressing information, financial stress and emotional strain can make you feel exhausted and unable to cope. As the cancer experience demands more energy, burnout reduces your productivity and saps your energy, and may leave you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Because burnout can affect so many parts of your life it is important to have strategies to prevent or combat burnout.

This brochure will teach you:

- ▶ Signs of burnout
- ▶ Tips for preventing burnout

## Signs of burnout

Many people living with cancer and their family caregivers have feelings or concerns that can

cancer treatment and order a free **LIVESTRONG™** Guidebook. You can also call **LIVESTRONG™** SurvivorCare, which can provide you, your family, friends and caregiver with information, education, counseling services and referrals to other resources. They will also help with financial, employment or insurance issues. You can also speak to a case manager Monday - Friday from 9am – 5pm EST.

### ▶ **American Cancer Society**

Toll-free: 1-800-ACS-2345

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

An information specialist can answer your questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They can also help you find support groups in your area. The website also has information on talking with your doctor.

### ▶ **National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)**

Toll-free: 1-877-622-7937

[www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)

As the oldest survivor-led advocacy organization, NCCS is a highly respected authentic voice at the Federal level, advocating for quality cancer care for all Americans and empowering cancer survivors. You can also find information about communicating with your doctor and building a healthcare team on the NCCS website.

- **Cancer Support Groups**

Many survivors find support groups helpful. You can hear other survivors' stories and learn ways to deal with your concerns. Hospitals or cancer treatment centers may have support groups that you can join. As your doctor or social worker or call **LIVESTRONG™** SurvivorCare for help finding a support group in your community. You may also consider joining an online support group. There are also options for one-on-one support. Support groups are also available for family and friends of people living with cancer.

## Resources

The following resources can help if you are dealing with burnout:

- ▶ **National Cancer Institute – Cancer Information Service**

Toll-free: 1-800-4-CANCER or 1-800-422-6237  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

You can speak with staff who can explain medical information in easy-to-understand terms. The website also includes multiple resources on coping with cancer.

- ▶ **Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF)**

Toll-free: 1-866-235-7205

[www.livestrong.org/cancersupport](http://www.livestrong.org/cancersupport)

At the LAF website you can read topics about

increase the risk for burnout. Some of these feelings include worries about your cancer, your future, or asking for help. Even though these feelings are natural, it is a good idea to be aware of how much they are affecting your life.

Here are some common signs of burnout:

- ▶ Feeling physically or mentally tired most the time
- ▶ Feeling that nothing is going right
- ▶ Losing interest in things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Losing motivation
- ▶ Feeling frustrated
- ▶ Changes in appetite or sleep habits

Although burnout has some of the same signs as depression the two are different. Long-term burnout can, however, lead to depression. It is important to talk to someone on your healthcare team about how you are feeling. The doctor can help you know if you are feeling burned out or depressed and make sure you get the help you need.

## Tips for preventing Burnout

The following tips can help lower stress in your life:

- ▶ **Get plenty of rest**

Listen to your body. It is very important that you take time to rest. Save your energy for important things and do not be afraid to say “no” if you do not have the energy to do something.

► **Build a team of care**

Build a team of family, friends, and others that can help you. Many people want to be able to help. Sharing the responsibilities can make everyone's load a little lighter. Keep in mind the following observations when building your team:

1. No one can cope with cancer all alone.
2. People want to help.
3. No one can help all the time.
4. Some people are particularly scared by cancer, scared by dependence and some do poorly in support roles.
5. One need not build the care team exclusively from people within the family and existing friends.
6. Care teams, like any other organization, require some management.

The first step is to list the tasks that you need help with. Some examples are:

- Shopping
- Cleaning
- Cooking
- Getting to and from doctor's visits & treatments
- Watching your children
- Taking your medicine
- Talking with your healthcare team
- Find reliable information

- Emotional support
- Sharing news and updates with your family, friends, and loved ones

Next identify people who are available to help and match each person with the task that fits them best. It may take some time for the team to work smoothly. In delegating some tasks you will be able to focus on doing the things that are most important to you and avoid becoming overwhelmed.

► **Do things you enjoy**

Take time for things that you enjoy such as hobbies, movies, and exercise. If possible, plan a vacation or visit people you love. Doing things you enjoy may take your mind off cancer and its stresses lessening your risk for burnout.

► **Find emotional support**

When you feel disconnected, frustrated or that too much is going on, talk to your family, friends, or others living with cancer about your feelings. Here are some people to whom you and your family or loved ones can talk:

- **Counselor**  
Ask your healthcare team to help you find a counselor who can meet your needs.
- **Chaplain or other spiritual leaders**  
Get support from churches or other faith groups. Your doctor or social worker can also refer you to a chaplain or spiritual advisor.