CBT

+ Light

for Women

with Breast Cancer

**Email module 5**

This email module includes information on dealing with anxiety and

the worries that you are likely to experience throughout your time

with breast cancer.

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**Managing worries and ruminations**

When you are first diagnosed with breast cancer, and as you progress through different phases of treatment, it is natural to feel a range of difficult emotions such as distress, fear, anxiety, loneliness, anger and sadness. There is no right way to feel, experiencing a range of emotions is normal and everyone will cope differently. One of the problems for sleep is that worries and fears can feel “bigger” at night time. Learning ways to manage these worries and fears is an important part of improving sleep.

Strategies for worry and rumination depend on the nature of the problem that keeps you worried.

**Solvable & Unsolvable Problems**

**Solvable Problems**

* Sometimes, we worry about problems we can do something about.  These are **“solvable problems”**.
* For example:
  + “I’m worried about whether I will be able to work during or after treatment”: you could work with your doctor and workplace to set up a plan for time away from work if necessary, and a plan for returning to work that suits your needs.
  + “I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow but haven’t arranged baby-sitting for my children yet”: asking for help and accepting help can be hard, but it is much needed when you go through treatments.

**Unsolvable Problems**

* Sometimes, we worry about problems we cannot easily solve. These are **“unsolvable problems”**. For example: “I’m worried that my cancer won’t go away” or “I’m worried that my cancer will come back” are very common thoughts that women with breast cancer have.
* It is natural to worry about the prognosis and treatment. Yet these thoughts can make going through treatment feel even more challenging, and add to distress.
* When you find yourself worried or stressed over a problem, ask yourself: “Is this problem ‘solvable’ or ‘unsolvable’?”

**For Solvable Problems**

**Some excellent approaches to solvable problems are:**

* Breaking bigger tasks into smaller ones
* Prioritizing important and urgent tasks
* Brainstorming for different solutions
* 1 step, and 1 thing at a time
* Set aside some time during the day (not when you are trying to sleep!) to tackle your concerns.
  + Making a list of the problems you are facing during the day is a great start.
  + Often the problems don’t seem as big, or as many, when you put them down on paper.
  + Solving problems means you take less of them to your bedroom.

**Don't worry about “solvable problems” in bed. Tell yourself:**

*“I have written this down and I will deal with it later”*

*“It’s a problem I can do something about, and I’ll think about it after I get up”*

*“I can’t do anything about it now but I will tackle it tomorrow”*

**For Unsolvable Problems**

* Remind yourself that these worries are about the future. As frightening as they can be, they are simply thoughts that our “Active Mind” creates. They are far from what is happening right here, right now, and they may have no relation to what the future will actually bring.
* Focus on skills practiced in the “Quiet Mind” section - anchoring your attention on your breath, in the “here and now”

**Try the following activities to:**

1. Deal with the many thoughts in an active mind, and
2. Help create distance between you and the thought or worry.

## Leaves on a stream

Imagine yourself sitting next to a moving stream with leaves floating on by.  Watch your thoughts as they arise and put them on the leaves one by one and watch them go further and further away with the stream.

## Conveyor Belt

Imagine a single conveyor belt moving right in front of you.  Put your thoughts and worries one by one as they arise, on the conveyor belt and watch them becoming smaller and smaller as they move further away.

## Thought/Bubble/Cloud

Look at your thoughts and imagine they are like clouds or bubbles coming into your vision and passing by.  See whether you can watch them come and go in front of you without trying to respond to or interact with them.

**Click here for a short mindfulness exercise to help manage thoughts (exploring thoughts)**

**Click here for a longer meditation focusing on breath and thoughts (breath and thoughts)**

**Reminders:**

3 key ingredients for sleep: sleep drive, body clock and a quiet mind.

30 minutes of bright light in the morning and dim light in the evening keep your clock tuned. Bright light during the day helps chase away sleepiness and fatigue. Remember not to drive when wearing the glasses.

Practise focusing on your breath during times of pain or distress. Belly breathing will help you to stay present and let go of tension throughout your body.

Go to bed at night only when you are sleepy