

What are my scan results – coping with uncertainty

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Scanxiety



Scanxiety - Two Scenarios

- You are told you have an abnormal CT scan
 - Do I have cancer?
 - Am I going to live?
 - When will we actually do something?
- You have cancer and have undergone treatment
 - Assessment of response
 - Surveillance for recurrence

You have an abnormal CT scan

- Recognize the majority of abnormalities are not cancer
 - Lung cancer screening – nodules are common
- Find a reliable team that can expedite the evaluation
- “Word of mouth” recommendations go a long way
- Communication is key

How do I cope?

- Rely on family, friends – social support network
- Do things you enjoy – exercise, yoga, music, movies, reading
- Maintain your normal schedule
- Admitting you are struggling emotionally, psychologically is not a sign of weakness

You have cancer and have undergone treatment

- We perform lots of imaging
- Indications
 - Surveillance after Surgery
 - Surveillance after Chemotherapy/Radiation
 - Monitoring response while on treatment

The Reality of Scanxiety

- Imaging is stressful
- Anxiety and anticipation leading up to scans
- Scanxiety is normal
- Scanxiety is almost universal
- Can cause a post-traumatic stress disorder type reaction

Symptoms of PTSD

- Hyperarousal
 - Easily startled – “on edge”
 - Feeling tense
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Angry outbursts – “short fuse”
- Avoidance behavior - isolation

Further enhancing scanxiety

- Falsely positive results with scans can occur frequently
- PET scans falsely positive 10-20% of the time
 - Difficult to interpret in patients who have had prior radiation, immunotherapy
- Uncertainty is very difficult for us to provide exact guidance, comfort, and reassurance

Strategies to Deal with Scanxiety

- Choose a team you have faith in – Ask them questions
- Be mindful about what you read
- Stress reduction strategies
 - Meditation
 - Exercise
 - What ever makes you less stressed
 - Maintain your schedule
- Scheduling – pick a time that is good for you and minimizes time between scan and results
- Consider a support group or chat room

Day of Scan

- Bring calm family or friend
- Music
- IPAD
- Book
- Same day office visit

For Difficult to Control Symptoms

- Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- Medications

Final thoughts

*Don't worry about
walking a mile
in my shoes,
just try a day
thinking in my head*