

# Five Things to Put in Your Backpack When Going for Treatment in Cancerville

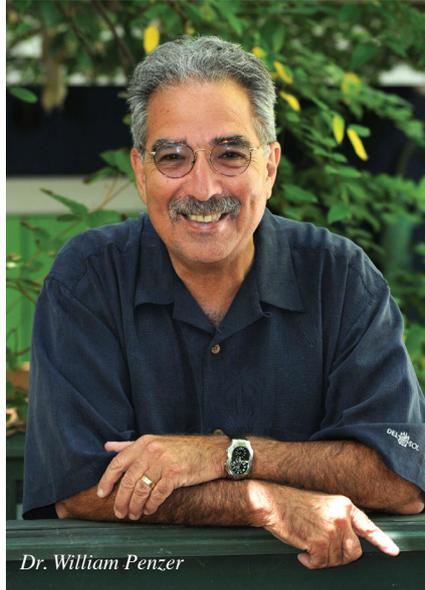
by William Penzer, PhD

**It's hard to find someone** who hasn't been touched by cancer. I was in just that position a few years ago when my daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 31. While sitting in the waiting room of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, I came to realize that cancer is not just a medical diagnosis; it's also a place. My daughter, my wife, and I had just entered what I came to call Cancerville.

Having been to Cancerville by proxy, I understand more clearly what people need to take with them when dealing with cancer and its treatment. You need to pack a lot more than your medical ID, PJs, and a warm sweater. Here are five things to bring along to help strengthen your mind and your body.

**A Positive Attitude** It can be difficult to maintain a hopeful, positive, and optimistic mindset when you are in Cancerville. It takes a great deal of work to push past the fears and worries, intrusive and debilitating treatments, fatigue, and disruption to just about every part of your life. You may falter, but what's important is that you dust yourself off and get back up again.

Positive mindsets come in a variety of personal styles. Seek out the ones that



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- ✿ I can manage the side effects of my treatment successfully.
- ✿ Today's treatment will hurt my cancer cells more than it will hurt me.
- ✿ My doctors and I are fighting back strongly.
- ✿ I will move forward.
- ✿ I am a survivor.

Be creative in finding the right affirmations for you. Come up with some strong words of fight, like a cheerleader at the sidelines of a football game. Root,

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work for you, and put them in your backpack. If possible, draw from them the night before treatment to pump up your emotional muscles. The stronger you can approach Cancerville, the more you will be able to hold your own on its turf. Cancer is a formidable foe, but so are you!

**Affirmations** Affirmations feed and stimulate your positive attitude. They are encouraging statements that you can repeat over and over in your mind. They help strengthen your resolve and help you stare back at cancer in an empowered way. Here are some examples:

- ✿ I can and will cope with my treatment today.

root, root for your home team, which in this case is you.

**Relaxing Resources** We all differ in what we find relaxing. Some people enjoy listening to music or reading poetry, while others prefer to read biblical passages or listen to podcast sermons. Some people find relaxation exercises helpful, while others prefer to watch movies.

What about people who find exercise, jogging, or rollerblading calming? Though it is not likely that you can do vigorous exercises in the corridors of your treatment center, you can visualize yourself doing activities that you enjoy.

Just close your eyes and picture yourself being active. You can do the same with good memories you have recorded in your mind.

**Distractions** Some cancer treatments – not to mention the waiting – can take a long time. Pack enjoyable distractions to engage your mind. These may include crossword puzzles, knitting or needlepoint projects, light-hearted or funny books, soothing music, movies, a newspaper or magazine, a sketchbook, or your laptop or tablet. The more you can distract yourself, the better you will feel.

**A Cheerleader** You may need a larger backpack for this one. If you can, bring a warm, upbeat, supportive cheerleader with you. For most people, nothing helps as much as human kindness and interaction during tough times. If such a person is available, see if he or she will come along with you to treatments.

However, it's OK if no one fits the bill. You can be your own cheerleader. Just relax and try to maintain an affirming and positive mindset. Others seeking treatment alongside you can be helpful as well, as they can relate to what you're going through. If you tend to be the shy, quiet type, try to reach out and talk to others. You never know where your next

source of inspiration might come from.

When heading for treatment in Cancerville, pack as much support as you can. A positive mindset and affirmations can empower your fight, while relaxation techniques and distractions can take your mind off the Cancerville scene. Together, these tools will help keep your mind strong while fortifying your body to take on cancer.

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