

# **DAILY ADVICES DURING RADIOTHERAPY AT THE TIME OF COVID-19**

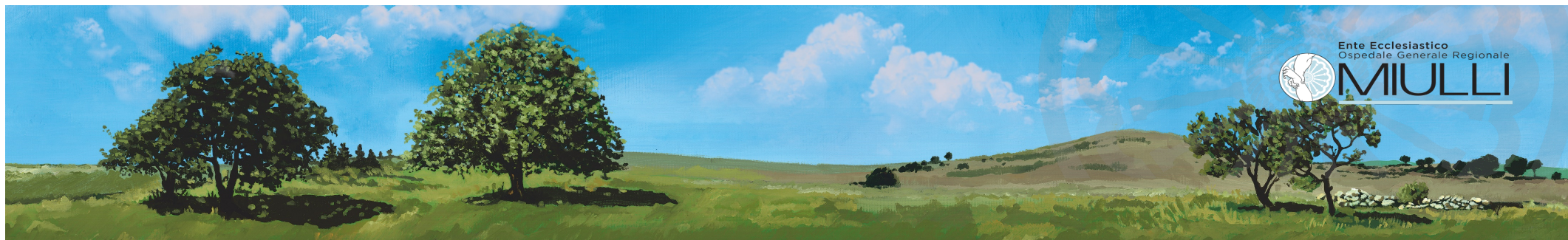


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## **BEING AN ONCOLOGICAL PATIENT UNDERGOING RADIATION THERAPY AT THE TIME OF COVID-19**

The Health Ministry in Italy has recommended several rules to reduce Covid-19 spread: wash your hands, do not touch nose and mouth, use masks and gloves, avoid contact with people, keep a distance of at least one meter, avoid hugs and kisses.

All these recommendations enclose with a real slogan: **#stayathome**.

BUT, in a time when EVERYTHING is closed, **for cancer patients everything continues**. And it must continue for their own safety.

All oncological "life-saving" treatments (including radiotherapy -RT-) give a chance to face the disease, but today, undergoing RT takes on a different meaning.

It is necessary to put it in a world that swim against the tide:

**"The healthy people stay at home while I must go out! Why me??? I am weak!"**

If the hospital becomes Covid-19 Center, the concern increases.

This situation emphasizes the patient's fear that has been there since cancer diagnosis.



## **HOW SHOULD I FEEL IN THIS THOUGH TIME? THE WORLD IS AT HOME WHILE I CONTINUE TO MOVE AROUND FOR MY HEALTH**

It is necessary to **help patients to dimension the various dynamics of life**, cognitively and emotionally, at hospital and at home.

It is important to evaluate phases of thought system that could trigger off:

- 1) *catastrophizing* (**I could die**),
- 2) *perception of responsibility* (**I could be infected and infect others**),
- 3) *feeling of vulnerability* (**I am powerless**),
- 4) *pay attention to negative aspects* (data on the **Covid-19 infected/deaths**).

In response to these thoughts, **the behaviors implemented** may be different:

- A) *cognitive* (I don't think about it);
- B) *behavioral avoidance* (I get distracted by doing many activities);
- C) *relational* (difficulty in emotional expression).

The **sense of powerlessness** and **Covid-19 physical suffering** (deterioration and transformation of the body image, breathing difficulties and dying in solitude) **frighten and could cause generalized anxiety**.

It could be experienced as a **TRAUMA**.



## WHAT COULD WE DO?

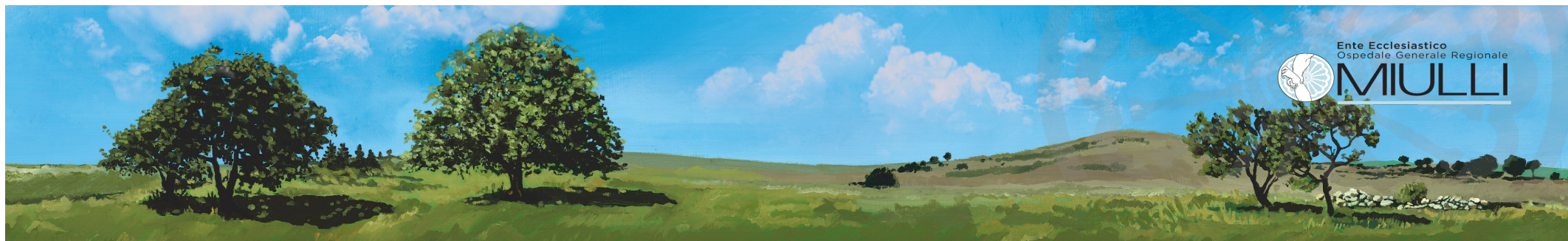
- ✓ **Recognize our emotional reactions**, in order to decrease our stress level as soon as possible.
- ✓ **Do not deny our feelings**, remembering that it is normal to have emotional reactions after devastating event.
- ✓ **Control our physical and emotional reactions**, recognizing our activation systems. Take a break to recover physical and mental energies.
- ✓ **Remember that we are not alone**: we can feel close to our family and friends by using technology and social media.
  - ✓ **Do not judge ourselves** "I'm a fool when I feel this way", "I shouldn't be like this"
- ✓ **Respect the emotional reactions of other people**, even when they are completely different from your point of view.
  - ✓ **Focus our attention on "I CAN"**.



## **HOW CAN WE ORGANIZE OUR DAY?**

### **The morning**

- ✓ Cultivate positive thoughts
  - ✓ Do what you love
  - ✓ Experience new things
- ✓ Create a comfortable corner of the house
  - ✓ Organize and mark your time
    - ✓ Eat well, don't binge
- ✓ Stay in touch with others (Facebook, videocall, etc.)
- ✓ Choose a time of day to keep yourself updated



## HOW CAN WE ORGANIZE OUR DAY?

### The night

- ✓ **Go to bed only if you are really sleepy.** Get out of bed if you don't fall asleep within a reasonable time.
  - ✓ **Associate the bed only with sleep** and create your own pre-sleep routines.
    - ✓ **Don't argue, don't talk about demanding issues** before sleeping.
    - ✓ **Sleep / awakening times** should be as **appropriate** as possible.
      - ✓ **Avoid daytime naps.**
- ✓ **Do not take alcohol, or exciting substances**, do not eat chocolate or sugar and do not drink large quantities of liquid (in the 2-3 hours before sleeping).
  - ✓ **Do not perform engaging activities** (mentally and/or physically) 1 hour before going to bed.
    - ✓ **Make the bedroom as comfortable as possible.**



## **MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES**

### **Take a "BREAK" when you feel intense emotions**

Stop whatever you're doing and ask yourself one of the following questions:

What is happening to me?  
How am I feeling right now?

You could adapt to you the questions in a more suitable way.

By doing this "BREAK" several times a day, you will develop the habit of interrupting automatic reactivity.

#### **Possible applications:**

- 1) Routine activities. We can have a rest every time we do something: during meals, while we check an email, while we get dressed or we are going out, etc.
- 2) Specific moments. We can have a rest whenever we are feeling: accelerated, anxious, stressed, irritated or annoyed.



## **MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES**

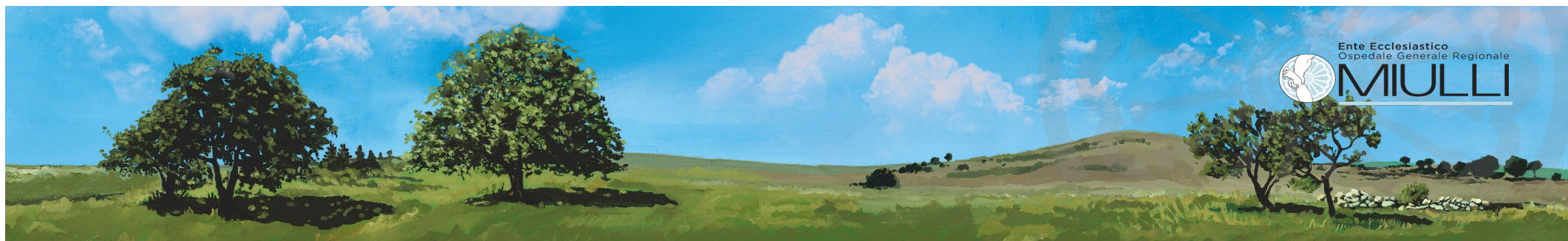
### **Breathing technique (3 minutes)**

1) **Shift your attention away from the present moment.** Become aware of your feet on the floor or of the perception of your own body. Connect with the feeling of your backbone that keeps you up, tall, proud ... and dignified.

2) **Now be aware of your breath ... Just feel the sensations of the breath** in the depth of your body. If you notice that your mind is distancing from the feeling of breath and is wandering towards thoughts, or is distracted, remember that this is not a problem, it is the way the mind works. Kindly, use the breath as an anchor to bring you back to the present moment. Ride the waves of breath, be aware of each inhalation and exhalation.

3) **Breath after breath, go on until you want to stop the little meditation.**





## **WHAT CAN WE THINK?**

Remember that "**WE**" in this moment takes on a stronger meaning. We can not embrace each other, but through the eyes we have a way of communicating closeness, hospitality ...

Now more than ever we need "warmth", only in this way we can reach the goal

**"Everything will be fine!"**

