Handout: Smoking and Alcohol Use among Cancer Survivors

Cancer survivors have told us that they sought out cigarettes and alcohol when they felt out of control to regain a sense of control and normalcy in their lives. However, in many cases, the momentary feeling of relief that came from smoking and drinking was intertwined with the lack of control participants felt over their lives. Below is what they told us.

"I just want some normalcy. I just wanna feel what I used to feel and do what I used to do. It's such a hard thing to express. Everything, your whole world is upside down. You know? And you want some sort of sense of control, and it's not the best control, obviously – old habits."

"I'm just trying to put one foot in front of the other. And I did quit. I quit smoking for a week. And it was just one morning I went on my morning walk. I was trying to do all the right things, and it took me everything to walk around the track that I was walking on and not cry just because I was so overwhelmed. And I stopped and got a pack of cigarettes. And then pretty soon I'm right back up there."

"There'd be times, at 2:00AM when I can't sleep, and my mouth might hurt, and I would go out and have a cigarette and maybe a sip of wine."

"I realized that I did smoke and drink more whenever I start to get self-aware, whenever I start to notice the changes in my body, I started to smoke more, drink more, just as a form of distraction, to take my mind off of what I was seeing in the mirror."

"My drinking would obviously increase a lot [when I felt pain], and then, I am one of those people, the more I drink, the more I will smoke so that also increases and goes with it. They coincide very easily for me."