



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

Life after Cancer

A guide for cancer survivors



Let's Make Cancer History

1 888 939-3333 | cancer.ca

The Canadian Cancer Society would like to thank The Cancer Council Victoria (Australia) for allowing us to adapt their booklet *Life after cancer: A guide for cancer survivors* (2007).

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Introduction

Many people who have been treated for cancer now live for many years after their cancer diagnosis. For some, treatment is “successful” and they are considered to be free of any signs of cancer. Others live for many years while still on medication or some sort of treatment as the cancer is managed as a chronic disease.

By now you may have heard the term “cancer survivor.” This means different things to different people. Some people use it to mean anyone with cancer, for example, someone newly diagnosed or someone having treatment. Others use it only to refer to people who are alive many years after their cancer treatment. In this booklet we use the term “cancer survivor” or “survivor” to mean anyone who:

- has finished and is recovering from their active cancer treatment
- is on maintenance therapy (such as tamoxifen)
- is having on-going treatment for a slow-growing cancer that is stable
- is being monitored (active surveillance or watchful waiting)
- is in remission

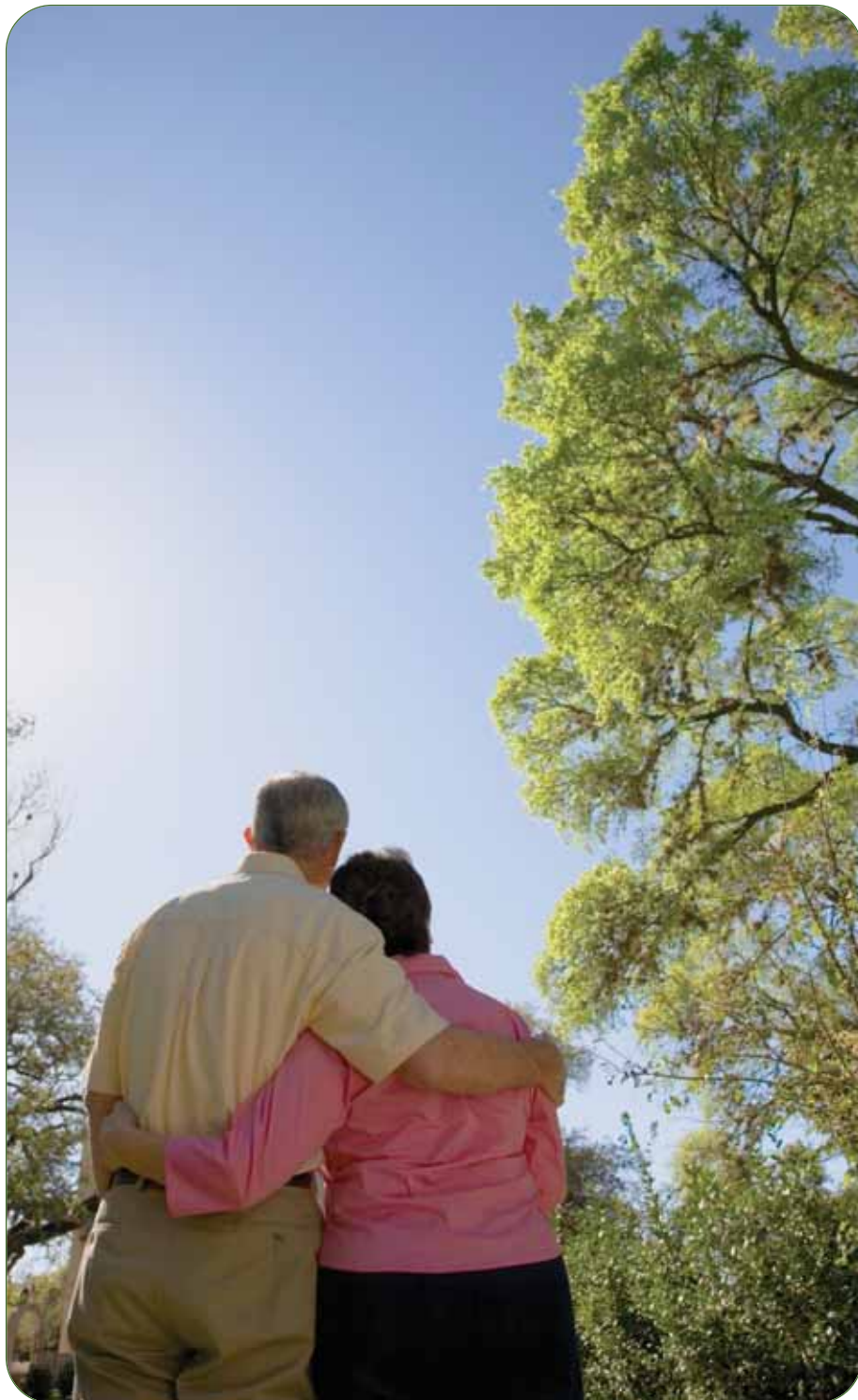
You may think that cancer survivor sounds strange. In fact, many people don’t like the term at all. But for others, it is a strong and positive way of describing their situation. Using it can help them to work through the challenges they sometimes have after their illness. No matter how you feel about this term, we hope that you will continue to read this booklet. It may offer you valuable support and information while you move forward with your life, and all that it offers.

“ *I think being a cancer survivor is almost a badge of honour.* ~ Mark

Your family and friends may also find it useful to read this booklet. It can help them to understand that although your treatment is over, you may still face some tough times. Their continuing love and support will help you cope. We encourage family and friends to also say when they are finding things hard.

If your doctor has told you that your cancer has advanced and cannot be cured, then this booklet may not be very helpful. People with advanced cancer may wish to contact our *Cancer Information Service* at 1 888 939-3333 for more information.

For ease of reading, you'll find the term "doctor" used in this booklet to describe the many healthcare professionals you may see as part of your medical care.



Your feelings after treatment

Reflecting on life after a cancer diagnosis is a common experience. Many people say that a cancer diagnosis makes you examine your priorities and responsibilities and can actually lead to a new, better outlook on life. But the journey isn't always easy, and it usually has highs and lows. Many people need some help along the way.

During your cancer treatment it may have been hard to imagine that it would ever come to an end. Maybe you were too scared to believe it would end or too anxious to think that it would be successful. You and your family were probably focusing on just getting through each day – getting to hospital appointments on time, having tests and dealing with the side effects of treatment. With so many emotions and changes going on in your life, you may not have thought much about life after treatment.

You may think that you should be able to just pick up where you left off before your cancer diagnosis. You may think that now's the time to return to a normal life, feel happy and positive about your future and feel relieved that you no longer have regular hospital visits.

Not everyone will have difficulties after their treatment finishes. But for many people, going back to “normal life” isn't that simple. You may no longer feel sick because of cancer or treatment side effects, but you might not be feeling that great either. Knowing what to expect after treatment can help you and your family deal with issues that may come up and any changes that you may have to make.

“ *Every cancer sufferer needs to go through an extraordinary process of readjustment after the treatment.* ~ Neil

Immediately after your treatment, along with the relief you might feel, it's very natural to have concerns about your future and how you will deal with challenges. Many people go through a mix of good and bad feelings. You may feel relief and happiness that your treatment seems to have been successful, but at the same time you're still concerned about the future. Some people feel frightened and lost at times, especially during the first few months. You no longer have the regular attention and support from your healthcare team. Even though they may have told you to call them if you are worried, you might not feel comfortable doing that. Your family and friends may not visit or call you as much. You may get the feeling that the people around you assume that you're doing okay.

Many survivors say that they feel lonely and angry about this. But, at the same time, you may think that you should be able to cope now that the cancer is gone. All these emotions and thoughts can be confusing or even overwhelming.

“ *As soon as the treatment finished, that was more of a shock. All of a sudden you're on your own. Having spoken to quite a few other people, they felt the same. Not that people have left you – I could call on anyone, I could call on the hospital, I could call on my doctors – but it wasn't the same, there wasn't active treatment going on.* ~ Patricia

Taking time to understand your feelings

Be kind to yourself during this time. Don't expect to feel great about everything. Go slowly and give yourself the space to come to terms with all that you've been through and what lies ahead. You may have long-term effects that you will have to deal with. You might feel sad that you can't do some things that you used to enjoy or uncertain about your health and the future. This can be very upsetting.

“ *Survival keeps on going; every day brings a new challenge. I think it's been both a curse and a blessing when I look back on it.* ~ Neil

It can be exhausting to try to stay positive all the time and act as if you're fine. While you may feel great some days, you may have days when you feel down, sad and alone. Other days you may feel angry, fearful or frustrated. While it can be difficult to try to listen to your feelings and accept them as they happen, it's okay – and normal – to have these feelings. It's better to try to work through negative thoughts, not ignore them. Most cancer survivors say that they feel better with time. But it might not happen overnight – so try not to expect too much from yourself too soon.

Some of your family or friends may keep telling you to be positive. You might find it helpful to let people know that you still have a lot to deal with. You need those who are close to you to try to understand your fears and be there to listen and support you.

You may find it helpful to think of “staying positive” as simply dealing with things in the best way that you can at the time. It can mean looking after yourself by finding relaxing, enjoyable activities that refresh you mentally, spiritually or physically. You might think about doing something you've always wanted to do – perhaps planning a trip or taking up a new hobby. It doesn't have to mean being happy

or cheerful all the time or that you have to avoid thinking about the difficulties of having had cancer.

If you continue to feel very down for long periods of time, see your doctor. You may be suffering from depression. This is different from the sadness and low moods that many cancer survivors have soon after their treatment. There is more information about depression and its symptoms on page 50.

Finding ways to accept your feelings

There is no right way to feel. Each person is different and has different concerns and worries.

Feeling negative takes up a lot of energy. When you have negative thoughts, remembering a happy time in your life may help. This might be difficult at first but it often becomes easier with practice.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Lean on those close to you. Support from others can be comforting. Having trouble coping on your own is not a weakness. If you don't feel comfortable talking to those close to you, a trained counsellor or a peer support volunteer who has been through a similar cancer experience may help. See this as a positive move toward your recovery.

As well as talking to others about how you feel, there are many other things that you can do. Take some time to figure out what works for you. For example, some people find it helpful to write about their feelings in a journal or to read other survivors' stories, while others find that being active every day helps improve their mood. After checking with your doctor, you may want to try a form of relaxation such as meditation, visualization, yoga, massage or deep breathing.

Throughout this booklet we discuss more ways of dealing with specific feelings and concerns. You can also find other resources listed at the back of the booklet. These can help you get the information and support that you need.



Reactions and needs of people close to you

After your cancer treatment is over, your family and friends are also likely to feel some strong emotions.

What happened to you might make them question things about their own life and future. Like you, their priorities may change. They may want to focus more on enjoying the important things in life, such as family and friends. This can be very positive. Your relationships may be stronger and more loving because of it. But you may also find that some of their reactions upset and frustrate you.

“ *While I was filled with confidence, [my parents] were filled with dread when I came out of it.* ~ Mark

Family and friends

For survivors, family and friends can be both a source of great comfort and strength, and also a source of stress or anxiety. Many survivors say that those very close to them don't really understand how much help they still need. They might expect you to be back to normal much faster than you can be. It can be difficult to let them know this. You might feel guilty about everything that you've already put them through. But don't let this override your true needs right now.

Family and close friends may have some unrealistic expectations of you. Your recovery may take longer than your actual treatment did. This may come as a shock to both you and your family. Everyone wants things to be easier now, less stressful and more enjoyable. But this isn't always possible and may be disappointing for everyone. For life to move forward, everyone needs to find a way to deal with this.

As you rebuild your life with those close to you, things are likely to become easier. This can take time and patience, but many survivors say their life after cancer has more meaning and is often more fulfilling.

Let your family and friends know that you understand it is hard for them as well. Tell them how much you appreciate all that they've done to help you. You still need their support.

“ *There were some friends who I think backed off and I was disappointed ... Some of my friendships that I thought I really valued didn't turn out to be like that ... It's not necessarily that they don't care, it's just that possibly they just don't know what to do or say.* ~ Rosemary

Most people want to help all they can, but sometimes they just don't know the best way to do this. They might think that ignoring what has happened and trying to move on as quickly as possible is the best thing for everyone. You might need to point out that you still feel very tired, vulnerable or scared. If you can work together and share your concerns, then it will be easier for everyone.

Children

Children can be a source of great joy and comfort for people recovering from cancer. Depending on your children's age, there will be different needs and issues to deal with. They may not have seen much of you during your treatment. They may have had fears that you may die. But whatever their age, be as open and honest as possible. This will make them feel safe. Most kids will understand that you still need some time to get over your treatment.

Where possible, try to involve your children in your recovery.

With younger children, if you are feeling too tired to play, suggest that they lie next to you and read a book or watch a movie while you take a nap - or curl up together and chat about things that you like to do together. This isn't so easy with kids under four, but maybe a friend or relative could come over and help you play with them. Two pairs of hands can make it less tiring! With older children, you may be able to ask them to help you cook, clean and shop, or to read to you while you lie down.

Involving your children whenever you can makes them feel that you want and need them near you and allows them to spend more time with you. This is all most kids want - to be as close to their parents as possible. Pushing them away or trying to hide your feelings and needs only confuses them and makes them feel lost and lonely. Kids can be the best medicine - they can make you laugh and feel good.

Will my children inherit my cancer?

Most cancers are not inherited. Passing on your genes to your children doesn't mean that they will get cancer. Only about 5% to 10% of cancers are inherited. And the older you are when you are diagnosed, the less likely it is that your genes play a part in cancer development. If you are worried that the cancer you had may be inherited, talk to your doctor. They can advise you about the risk and whether your children need to have regular testing or monitoring as they get older. If necessary, they will also be able to refer you for genetic testing and counselling.



Returning to a normal life

Many survivors return to an active and full life after their cancer treatment finishes. But some survivors have problems getting back to normal day-to-day life following treatment. You may find a new way of living and your new “normal” will be different.

“ *You never get back to the normal you knew before you had cancer. It’s a series of evolution – evolving as a different person.* ~ Julie

Finding a new normal

How you feel and what you have to work through will depend on the type of cancer you had. If you have long-term effects from your treatment, these will also play a big part in your recovery.

Many survivors suffer from ongoing pain or experience depression at some stage of their illness. Physical changes to your body can make returning to work, sports and social activities hard. For example, you may no longer be able to do certain things or your ability to talk or eat may be affected. Scars left from surgery may affect your body image. Fatigue (feeling extremely tired and lacking energy) is also a common problem for many people long after their treatment is over. All these symptoms can wear you down and make day-to-day living difficult.

People around you may not even realize what you're going through, which can make things even harder. They may say things like, “Now that your treatment is over, you must be looking forward to getting back to normal.” What does “normal” mean anyway? You might not feel able to or even want to go back to how life was before your diagnosis. Many survivors say that they feel like a different person, having been through a life-changing experience. You may have different priorities, interests and attitudes about life now.

“ You come out and everybody says, “Okay, you’re okay now, and you can go back to your life,” but you’re completely different from how you went in. Physically, emotionally, you’re a wreck – you just don’t feel like the same person: bloated, put on a lot of weight, can’t walk properly, don’t have any hair, extraordinarily tired. You know ... they tell you it’s over, but it doesn’t feel over.

~ Georgina

It's important to give yourself time to adjust to things after you finish treatment. This is especially important if there are major changes in the way you look, feel or how you can move around or communicate with others. Take things at your own pace. You don't need to sort out everything at once. It can take time to find the right way to deal with each problem. Try not to be led by what others think you should be doing.

There will come a time when you might need to push yourself a bit. Go out and do everyday things again like shopping, seeing friends or maybe going back to work. To begin with, this may feel very scary. Staying at home may seem much easier. But in the long-term, most people say that getting out makes them feel better.

Tips on getting your life back

Everyone is unique and deals differently with life after treatment. Some people receive a lot of love and support from family and friends. Others may not. Some doctors give plenty of information about coping after treatment, while others don't.

Whatever your situation, life is likely to be different than it was before you had cancer. The following tips may help:

- Take a nap when you need to. Your mind and body still need a lot of rest to recover from all you've been through.
- Get extra help doing housework, errands and shopping. Most family and friends will want to help out.
- Share your feelings and worries with the people who are close to you. Some people say that this helps a lot.
- Speak with another cancer survivor.
- Go out with a friend or family member if you're feeling nervous about going out for the first time.
- Tell people only what you feel comfortable talking about. You don't have to explain everything to everyone.
- Try not to get upset if people don't know how to react to you. Remember that most people don't mean to hurt you.
- If you are going back to work, work only a few hours a week to begin with and build up slowly.

If things get too hard and you feel very down for longer than a couple of weeks, make an appointment to see your doctor to discuss ways of helping you cope. Some people may find this difficult to do or think of it as a weakness, but we all need a bit of help now and then. You may feel better for just having told someone about your feelings.



Follow-up care

Better treatments mean that many cancer survivors are living much longer. When you finished treatment, your doctor probably told you that you would need regular checkups. These checkups are part of your follow-up care to keep track of how you're doing.

Follow-up appointments may make you feel anxious, especially during the couple of weeks before the appointment. You may keep having thoughts about the cancer coming back. You may worry that your doctor will find a different (new) cancer. There is more information about living with the fear of cancer coming back on page 29.

Look at the checkup as an opportunity to take charge of your health. At your first appointment, ask what you might expect from your follow-up care. If you don't already know, ask who you should contact if you are worried. Get phone numbers and times when it is best to contact them. See page 26 for a list of questions you may find helpful to ask your doctor or other members of your healthcare team.

Some research suggests that there is a difference between what cancer survivors and doctors expect from follow-up appointments. Your doctor may ask you about things that are not worrying you at all, but may not ask about things that you're concerned about. Talk to your doctor about your concerns even if they don't ask. It's important to feel that you are getting the follow-up care you need.

If your doctor is using words or phrases that are difficult to understand, ask for things to be explained in a simpler way. Don't leave the appointment wondering what was meant. You have the right to find out the things you want to know. If time is a problem, ask for a longer appointment next time. If you continue to feel unhappy with the answers you are getting, let your doctor know this.

Keep your doctors informed

If you see healthcare professionals other than your cancer specialist (for example, dentists, dietitians and complementary practitioners), it is very important that you tell them about your cancer and its treatment. It may affect their decisions about the care you should receive.

Why do I need regular checkups?

Everyone is different and follow-up care will vary depending on the type of cancer and treatment you had and any long-term effects you are experiencing. There are a couple of reasons for follow-up:

- to detect problems early, including signs that the cancer may be coming back
- to monitor your health and well-being and reassure you that everything is okay

Most people will see the doctor every few months for the first couple of years after their treatment finishes. As time goes on, and assuming that you stay well, checkups will gradually become less frequent. Your doctor will let you know how often you should be seen and whether you should still be seeing a cancer specialist regularly.

What happens during checkups?

The doctor will examine you and ask how you've been feeling. Don't be afraid to tell the truth. For example, if your mood has been low, say so. Tell them about any symptoms that are bothering you. Depending on the type of cancer you had, you may need to have tests, such as blood tests, x-rays or scans.

Coping with anxiety before your checkups

Many cancer survivors say that they begin to feel very anxious before their routine checkups. Sleeping problems, bad dreams and feeling more aches and pains than usual are common in the days before the appointment. Some people suffer from mood swings and poor appetite.

“ *You do get nervous and you tell yourself in your mind it's only a checkup and they're not doing it for any reason other than it's just a checkup – but it becomes this mountain.* ~ Georgina

There are many reasons why you may feel anxious before each checkup. The main one for most people is the fear that they will be told their cancer has come back.

You may also feel anxious because going back to the hospital brings back memories of your treatment, tests and side effects. Just when your life is getting back to normal and you feel in control again, a checkup can make you feel vulnerable and fearful. It forces you to think about the possibility of cancer coming back and your life being turned upside down again.

Finding ways to manage your anxiety about checkups is important. Once you've had a few checkups and all is okay, you may be able to approach them with less concern. The following tips may help:

- Take a close friend or relative with you – don't try to deal with it alone. You will be surprised by how much it helps to share your fears. And people close to you want to feel like they are helping.
- Write your questions down before you go. It may be helpful if your friend or loved one takes notes of what was discussed.
- Make the day something to look forward to. Plan to do something special after your appointment – go out for a nice meal or buy yourself a treat.

Most cancer survivors say that it's very hard not to think about their next checkup and wonder what the outcome will be. Do you prepare yourself for the worst or think that everything will be well? Everyone deals with things in their own way. It's important that you feel comfortable with your follow-up plan, so discuss it with your doctor.

Questions to ask at your first appointment

- What symptoms should I be watching for?
- How long will I have to take the medications that I'm on?
Do they have any side effects?
- Who will manage any long-term effects such as pain and fatigue?
- What other long-term effects might I have? Is there any treatment for them?
- Where can I go to get more information about my follow-up care?
Will my family doctor be involved?
- What can I do to make it easier to go back to work and get back into my social life?
- What can I do to reduce the chances of cancer coming back?

Want to know more about follow-up?

Your doctor and other members of your healthcare team can tell you more about plans for your follow-up care.

The Canadian Cancer Society has general follow-up information for many types of cancer. You may also be interested in keeping up-to-date with any new research results in follow-up care.

- Call toll-free at 1 888 939-3333 to speak to an information specialist.
- E-mail us at info@cis.cancer.ca.
- Visit our website at cancer.ca.

Our services are free and confidential.



Fear of cancer coming back

It's normal to wonder if cancer will return, and to think about how you will react and cope if it does. Worrying that the cancer will come back is one of the most common fears people have after cancer treatment.

Living with the possibility of cancer coming back is very challenging. For some people the fear is so strong that day-to-day life is a struggle. They don't find any joy in life or believe that they ever will again. Living with this fear has been described as a shadow - no matter which way you turn, it's always there.

“ *The fear is always there. It never goes away completely.*
~ Maria

As time goes by, many people find that their fear of cancer coming back becomes less and they find themselves thinking about cancer less often. Certain events, however, may bring the worries back. These include:

- special occasions - birthdays, religious holidays, anniversaries
- the dates you were diagnosed and your treatment finished
- just before and during follow-up appointments
- hearing about someone else getting cancer
- having symptoms that are similar to those you had when you were first diagnosed with cancer
- someone you know dying from cancer or another illness
- passing by the hospital where you had your treatment or having to visit someone in the same hospital
- reading or hearing about cancer, new treatments or celebrities with cancer

“ *Cancer will always leave a scar. The scars are internal, they're emotional, they're intellectual, and they are physical. The physical scars are probably the least of the worries, but it's the emotional scars that people go through in their journey.* ~ Neil

What symptoms should I watch out for?

Your cancer specialist is the best person to speak with about what symptoms you should look out for and report. If you do have a symptom, try not to worry about it too much. Make an appointment to see your doctor. You don't need to wait until your next scheduled appointment.

They will be able to reassure you and decide whether or not you need to have any tests. A lot of symptoms have nothing to do with cancer. You may just have a headache or upset stomach or feel tired and run down from the past few months of your treatment.

Unless your doctor tells you something more specific, the important thing is for you to know your body and what's normal for you.

How likely is it that the cancer will come back?

Generally, the more time that goes by, the less likely it is that cancer will recur. The more years that pass without a recurrence, the higher your chance of a cure. This is true for most types of cancers.

Your doctor will be able to give you some answers based on research studies and from their experience with other patients, but there will always be some uncertainty. Even the best doctor in the world won't be able to tell you for sure what will happen. Try not to let it get you down. Many cancer survivors say that, with time, they find their own way of coping with the possibility of cancer coming back.

“ *I live with the fear of recurrence and the stigma of cancer. Not only that, I feel I have “grown old before I should have” and that I am still grappling with changes to my life roles. There is still a stigma around cancer you know ... and that invades every aspect of your life ... Yet, here I am, a survivor.* ~ Helen

Survival statistics

Survival statistics are one tool that doctors use to help provide the best estimate for a person's chances of survival from cancer. Doctors often look at studies that measure survival for a particular type and stage of cancer. Most of these studies follow patients for 5 or 10 years, so your doctor is likely to use one of these statistics depending on your cancer.

For example, if the 5-year relative survival statistic for a type of cancer is 95%, this means that, on average, people diagnosed with this type of cancer are 95% as likely to live 5 years (or more) after diagnosis as people in the general population who do not have cancer. This does not mean that a person with this cancer is only going to live 5 years. Many people live much longer, especially when their cancer is detected and treated early.

Cancer survival statistics must be interpreted carefully. Because survival statistics are based on the experience of groups of people, they cannot be used to predict an individual person's chances of survival. Cancer survival statistics:

- are general estimates
- can vary widely based on the stage or grade of the cancer
- are estimates based on data that are sometimes several years old and therefore may not reflect the impact of recent advances in early detection or treatment
- do not account for the impact of other illnesses, individual responses to treatment, or people dying of other causes

Not everyone wants to talk to their doctor about survival rates or feels ready to find out about them immediately after finishing treatment. So only ask if it's something you feel comfortable knowing. You may want to wait a few months, or you may never want to ask. There is no right way to feel about this.

Could I develop a different type of cancer?

Most people who get cancer only get one primary type. It is rare, but possible, to develop another, different cancer. Your risk may be higher if:

- You were born with genes that increase your risk of developing cancer.
- You have previously been exposed to cancer-causing agents such as tobacco smoke.
- Your previous cancer treatment increased your risk. (For example, radiation therapy can sometimes increase the risk of getting a different cancer later in life, especially if you had treatment in childhood.)

If you have concerns about developing a different type of cancer, talk to a member of your healthcare team. They should be able to give you information specific to you and the treatment you had.

Given your experience with cancer, you may already know about screening programs, which are designed to find cancer in people with average risk who have no reason to believe they are sick. For people who have a higher than average risk of developing a particular type of cancer, their doctor might suggest getting tested earlier, more often or in a different way than the general population.

Your doctor is the best person to suggest which examination or test is appropriate to monitor your health, based on your lifestyle and personal and family medical history.

Need more information about early detection and screening?

The Canadian Cancer Society has general information about early detection and screening for both men and women. To contact us for more information:

- Call toll-free at 1 888 939-3333 to speak to an information specialist.
- E-mail us at info@cis.cancer.ca.
- Visit our website at cancer.ca.



Late and long-term effects of cancer treatment

After your cancer treatment is over, you may think that you won't have to deal with side effects any more. This isn't true for everyone. It can take time to get over the effects of your treatment. Some problems will disappear quickly. Others can take weeks, months or even years to go away. These are called long-term effects.

For some people, there may be permanent or late effects. Late effects are problems that appear a long time after treatment finishes.

Late and long-term effects will vary depending on the type and stage of cancer as well as the type of treatment you had. Some people – for example, people who have lost a limb or the ability to eat and drink properly – need to make permanent changes to their lives. Other changes may be required to deal with sexual difficulties, incontinence, pain or fatigue. You may also suffer from emotional changes such as anxiety, depression or loss of confidence.

Any change in how your body looks, feels or functions can be very hard to deal with. Other people may not be able to fully understand how much these changes can affect your day-to-day living. This can be very isolating and make it even harder to deal with.

Everyone is different. Someone who had the same type of cancer and treatment as you may recover faster or slower. You may suffer from effects that they didn't. Your body will cope with treatment and recovery in its own way. Some of the challenges that survivors face include:

- fatigue (feeling very tired)
- pain
- changes in self-esteem and confidence in their body
- changes in the way their bladder or bowel works
- menopausal symptoms
- problems with eating, drinking

- maintaining a healthy weight
- mouth and teeth problems
- osteoporosis (loss of bone density)
- fertility problems
- lymphedema (swelling of a limb)
- changes in sexuality and sex life

Late and long-term effects may be made worse by other health problems that you had before you were diagnosed with cancer, for example, diabetes, arthritis or heart problems. Getting older can also make some problems more difficult to get through. It's important to ask for medical help for any problems that you may have.

You may also benefit from emotional support. Late and long-term effects can cause strong emotions, and finding the best way to work through them can take time and patience.

“ *The more you know, the better your chances are ... You make better choices, you feel more confident.* ~ Jason

It's important to find the right support to help you manage and cope with any late or long-term effects you have. You may find it helpful to join a support group. Many cancer survivors say that talking to others who are having similar difficulties after treatment can help a lot.

If you have concerns about late or long-term effects, talk to your healthcare team. They will be able to let you know if you are at risk and who can help you manage the effects.

Want to talk to someone?

The Canadian Cancer Society can help you find the support you need close to home. Contact us to find out about professional counselling in your community or to find out what programs and services are available.

If you would like to talk to someone who understands what you're going through, we can help you connect with a trained volunteer who has had a similar experience. Depending on what's available in your area, you may meet with your volunteer in person or over the phone. To find out more:

- Call us at 1 888 939-3333.
- Visit the support/services section of our website at cancer.ca.
- Contact your local Canadian Cancer Society office.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a very common side effect of cancer treatment. It means feeling very tired and lacking energy to do day-to-day activities. Fatigue for cancer survivors can be very different from normal tiredness. It doesn't always go away with rest or sleep.

Fatigue during treatment can be caused by the treatment itself, poor nutrition, pain or having too few red blood cells (anemia). But doctors are still trying to find out the exact causes and ways of managing fatigue after treatment finishes.

You may think that now that your treatment is over, you should be full of energy. But it's normal to feel very tired a lot of the time. Many cancer survivors say that in the first year after treatment, fatigue is still a very disruptive side effect. Some people say that it greatly affects their quality of life. Day-to-day tasks such as bathing, cleaning, shopping, eating and cooking may leave you feeling completely exhausted. Even talking to those close to you can sometimes feel too tiring. Some people may feel that they have to give up working because they feel too tired.

“ *I had no idea that I would still be feeling tired five months after finishing treatment ... I didn't know how to make it better and I was scared that's how it would be – that I wouldn't go back to normal, that I would never go back to having energy again.* ~ Georgina

Fatigue can go on for weeks or months after treatment. For some people, it will take longer. For example, people who have had a bone marrow transplant as part of their cancer treatment may lack energy for years after they finish treatment.

Cancer survivors have described their fatigue as:

- overwhelming, unbelievable, debilitating and frustrating
- unrelated to the amount of activity
- affecting the whole body – every part feels tired and worn out and muscles may ache
- difficult to describe and hard for others to understand
- not helped by rest or sleep
- mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting
- a heaviness, especially in the arms and legs

If fatigue continues for long periods of time, you may begin to feel quite down about it. Many survivors worry that their fatigue is a sign that cancer has come back or that it never really went away. You may lose interest in things that you usually like doing or be unable to concentrate on one thing for very long. It can affect how you feel about yourself and others, which may affect your close relationships.

You may worry that your friends or family won't believe you or might think that you're complaining too much if you keep saying how tired you feel. They may not appreciate the long-term effects that fatigue can have on you. Letting those close to you know will help them to understand why you might be feeling so down or lacking motivation.

Ways to help relieve fatigue

A lot of cancer survivors don't ever report fatigue to their doctor because they think that nothing can be done about it. Doctors are taking more notice of this symptom and are finding ways to help relieve or manage fatigue.

If your fatigue is caused by medical reasons such as too few red blood cells or by side effects of drugs that you are taking, your doctor may be able to treat the cause. You may have to learn to take short cuts and get help from others to manage your fatigue.

Not all of these things will work for everyone, but you may be surprised at how making small changes can help to save energy:

- Prioritize activities. Do things that are most important first and leave less important things for later.
- Keep a regular sleep routine. Try to get enough sleep during the night.
- Schedule short rest periods throughout the day. Rest before you get too tired.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Get a friend to pick the kids up from school, do the shopping, or come and clean the house once a week. Ask someone else to do heavy work where possible.
- Plan ahead and try not to rush – leave plenty of time to get to appointments.
- Sit down when you are talking on the phone, cutting up vegetables or folding laundry.
- Say no to things that you really don't feel like doing. Try not to feel like you have to please others all the time.
- Get some exercise. This may be the last thing you feel like doing. But even if you just walk around the yard or block a few times a week it may help you feel better. Ask your healthcare team for help in developing an exercise plan.
- Eat nutritious meals and snacks throughout the day to keep your energy level up.
- Try to take some time out each day to do something that you enjoy.

Pain

Pain following cancer treatment is a common side effect. For example, chemotherapy and surgery can injure nerves and cause pain and numbness in certain areas of the body. Skin may be very sensitive in the area that received radiation therapy. Scars from surgery can also be painful.

Some people have pain in a missing limb or breast. This is called *phantom pain*. If you suffer from this type of pain, you may think that it's due to your imagination, but it isn't. This type of pain can be very difficult to deal with.

Whatever type of pain you have, it's important to get relief. No one should live with pain.

Being honest with yourself and members of your healthcare team is the key to getting your pain under control. No one else can really know how much pain you're in unless you tell them. Tell your doctor exactly how bad the pain is and how much it affects your day-to-day life. Only then can your doctor offer suggestions that might help. Depending on your symptoms, you may be referred to a specialist in pain control.

Don't feel that you should be able to handle the pain and that it's something you just have to put up with. Asking for help isn't a weakness. You likely have enough to deal with, and trying to live with pain will only make things harder for you.

Pain-relieving drugs

Depending on the type and severity of your pain, your doctor may prescribe pain-relieving drugs (analgesics).

Your doctor may begin with a mild pain-killer or anti-inflammatory drug, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Your doctor will prescribe stronger drugs if necessary to help control your type of pain.

Pain-relieving drugs work best if taken before you are in a lot of pain. It's very important to take medicines as prescribed by your doctor. Don't skip a dose because you're not in pain at that particular moment. The idea is to keep the pain under control. If it gets out of hand, you may need to take higher doses of the drug. Alternating between having no pain and having a lot of pain is very emotionally and physically draining. You'll probably feel much more in control and able to cope if you are not in pain.

Some cancer survivors feel like they're giving up when they need to take strong pain-relieving drugs such as morphine. Some people even think that it means that they are going to die. This isn't true.

Controlling your pain is not the same as addiction

You may worry about becoming addicted. Your healthcare team will make sure that the medication you take to help with your pain is just enough to keep your pain under control.

If your pain is very severe, you may need to take high doses of these drugs to help control it. If you are taking a pain reliever for long periods of time, your body may get used to the drug and the dose may need to be increased.

None of this means you're addicted. Being addicted to a drug is complex, but a key part of it is a psychological dependence on the drug. This happens when the need to continue using it becomes a craving or a compulsion that is more than just physical. Getting addicted is not likely to happen if you're taking medications to control pain, take the correct dose and see your doctor regularly.

Other ways to treat pain

There are other types of drugs, such as antidepressants and anti-seizure drugs that can help relieve certain types of pain related to cancer. Nerve blocks and surgery can also help some people.

Physiotherapy may also help with pain. The therapist may use heat, cold, massage or exercise. Some people get relief with acupuncture. The acupuncturist inserts thin needles into pressure points on the body to help control pain. If you're thinking of using any of these therapies, talk to your doctor.

Ways you can try to manage your pain

You can do several things to help manage your pain. They may give you some relief, even if only for a short time. Many people say that doing something for themselves gives them a feeling of having some control over their pain. Your pain may be worse at certain times of the day or when you are feeling anxious or upset. Take note of these times.

Some of the following tips may help you cope with pain:

- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.
- Listen to music or relaxation CDs with earphones in bed if you have trouble falling asleep at night because of your pain.
- Ask someone close to you to give you a gentle massage. It can help relieve aches and pains in the back.
- Apply a warm or cold pack to the area. Wrap the pack in a soft towel and check your skin regularly to make sure the temperature is not damaging your skin.
- Take a warm bath or shower.
- Don't sit or lie too long in one place. Change your position regularly to help prevent stiffness and sore skin.
- Talk to friends or family about your pain. This may help relieve tension and make it easier to deal with pain. Some people find it

easier to talk to a counsellor or a peer support volunteer who has been through a similar cancer experience rather than someone close to them.

Body image and self-esteem

Not everyone who has had cancer treatment will have changes in their appearance or problems with body image or self-esteem. But if you have scars or changes in the way your body works, you may have trouble dealing with it.

Cancer and its treatment can affect how people look and feel about themselves. How you look and how well your body functions are important parts of your self-esteem. Many cancer survivors say that they feel angry and upset by the changes that cancer and its treatment have caused. For some people, these feelings can last a long time.

Trying to accept sudden or unexpected changes to the way you look isn't always easy, especially if you are not entirely comfortable with them. You may worry about how your friends and family look at you now and whether you are still physically attractive. Some survivors worry about how they will manage when they go back to work or even if they will be able to return to their old job.

It's natural to worry about this. Try to get support from those close to you. Let them know how you're feeling. They are likely to want to support you and reassure you that they still love and see you in the same way they did before you had cancer. Hearing these words may help boost your confidence.

If you don't feel comfortable sharing your feelings with friends or family, it may help to talk to a counsellor. Some people find it helpful to talk with someone who has had a similar cancer experience.

Sexuality

Cancer and its treatment may affect your ability or desire to have sex. You may not even be aware that you're not taking an interest in sex or being as intimate as you were before.

Some people won't feel any different after treatment. But if you do, it can be very hard to deal with. Some of the changes are temporary, but others may be longer lasting. Anyone who has had cancer may have sexual concerns following treatment, but cancer survivors most likely to report long-term problems are:

- women who have had long-term treatment for breast, ovarian, uterine or cervical cancer
- men who have had treatment for prostate cancer

What causes the problems?

Sexual problems can be caused by many things, including:

- how you see yourself (your body image)
- changes in how your body looks or functions because of treatment
- pain and the side effects of pain-relieving drugs
- fatigue
- a range of emotions due to cancer and its treatment, such as anger, sadness and fear
- how your partner reacts and responds to you
- practical matters such as your job, money and caring for children

The types of problems you may have

Because we are unique and have different sexual needs and desires, it is very difficult to predict how each person will be affected sexually. A lot will depend on the type of cancer and treatment that you had.

Some women may find that physical changes to their body make it difficult or painful to have sex. Pain is often related to changes in the size of the vagina or vaginal dryness because of hormone treatment,

pelvic surgery or radiation therapy. Early menopause brought on by treatment can also affect women's sexual desire.

Men who have had surgery (for example, for prostate or colorectal cancer) may experience problems with getting an erection or ejaculating.

Having cancer and treatment may just have made you feel differently about your body. You may feel less sexual because you look different or feel less attractive. Perhaps you lost or gained weight, have a colostomy bag or had a testicle or breast removed. This may make you feel uncomfortable having sex.

You may feel embarrassed and upset by the changes and not want your partner to see you without your clothes on. This is very common. It may take some time before you feel confident about your new appearance and want to have sex again.

Some people say that they were not prepared for the sexual changes caused by treatment. Others say that they avoid all forms of intimacy including hugs, kisses and sharing feelings because they fear that it may lead to sex. Some people worry that they will never be able to have an intimate relationship again.

If your cancer treatment has affected your ability to have children, this may also change the way you feel about having sex.

You don't have to do anything that you don't feel comfortable with. Talk to your partner. Let them know why you don't want sex, but reassure them that you love them and want to be close. Most partners will be very understanding and happy to do things at your pace.

“ *I didn't know when ... it was safe to have sexual intercourse again. These things just weren't mentioned ...*

~ Abbie

Ways of coping with sexual changes

Coping with sexual concerns will vary from person to person. What works for one person may not be helpful for another. Some of the following suggestions may help if you are having problems with your sex life following cancer treatment:

- Concentrate on being intimate in other ways, such as hugging, kissing, massaging, talking and holding hands.
- Talk about it with your partner if you have low or no sex drive.
- Try experimenting with ways of making you feel “in the mood”. For example, dress up, use candlelight and music or have a nice meal with your partner.
- Plan ahead if you have some pain but do want to have sex. Taking pain relievers an hour or so before may make things more enjoyable.
- Change positions during sex to see which is the most comfortable.
- Talk to your partner about what you want and both feel comfortable with. This may be difficult at first but might also be very reassuring.
- Discuss the problems with your doctor. They may be able to prescribe medications to help with some problems such as difficulties getting an erection.
- Try a lubricant if you have vaginal dryness or tightness.
- Let your partner know if you need more foreplay to help you relax and enjoy making love. It may take more time to become aroused.
- Try pleasuring yourself if you have trouble being aroused by your partner. Some people say that this helps give them the confidence that they can still enjoy sex. It might just take some time with your partner.
- Think about whether it might be helpful to talk to someone about your sexual concerns. Many people find this helpful, but not everyone finds it easy to talk to someone close to them. You may prefer to talk to a counsellor.

For more information on sexuality

The Canadian Cancer Society’s booklet *Sexuality and Cancer: A guide for people with cancer* has more information on dealing with sexual problems. Although this booklet was written for people who are having cancer treatment, it has a lot of useful information that applies to cancer survivors as well.

Menopausal symptoms

Menopause occurs naturally as women age, usually when a woman reaches her early 50s. Menopause means that the ovaries no longer produce an egg each month and menstrual periods stop. This means that you can no longer become pregnant.

Women treated for some types of cancer may experience early menopause as a side effect of certain cancer treatments (for example, certain types of chemotherapy, radiation therapy to the pelvic area, surgery to remove the ovaries). This is known as *treatment-induced menopause*. For women who want children and have not yet had them, this can be devastating. Even if you already have had children, don’t want any more or never did want children, it may still be very upsetting.

Going through natural menopause is often a very difficult time for women. But it can be even more difficult if it happens suddenly because of cancer treatment. Some women find menopause hard because they feel as if it’s taken away a part of their identity as a woman.

Symptoms of menopause include:

- mood changes or irritability
- vaginal dryness (which can make it painful or uncomfortable to have sex)
- hot flashes and sweating (often made worse by taking anti-estrogen drugs such as tamoxifen)
- problems sleeping

- problems with concentration and memory
- loss of bone density (osteoporosis)
- weight gain

It may be reassuring to know that many of these symptoms will eventually pass. But it can take up to a couple of years. Others, such as osteoporosis, do not go away.

For men

Men do not go through menopause, but men who have hormonal treatment for cancer may have similar symptoms (for example, hot flashes). The information on coping in this section may help men as well.

Coping with menopausal symptoms

Below are some suggestions that may help lessen some of the symptoms of menopause.

Mood changes

Many women say that during menopause the changes in their feelings and moods can be very upsetting for them and those close to them. Feeling low, sad, angry, anxious, irritable, frustrated or depressed is not uncommon. You may find it very hard to deal with your feelings and not know who to talk to. Many women say that it can help to:

- Be active – develop a daily exercise program that suits you and try to stick to it.
- Eat well – a balanced diet keeps your body and mind healthy.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, listening to music or meditation. Regular practice may help you feel calmer and more in control of your feelings.
- Let those close to you know how you're feeling. If they don't understand your moods, it is likely to cause more problems.

Vaginal dryness

Ask your doctor about using a vitamin E vaginal suppository, an estrogen vaginal ring or vaginal cream to relieve symptoms. Vaginal rings and creams generally give low doses of estrogen directly to the vagina, but the amount of estrogen that enters the bloodstream depends on the type of hormone and the dose. These may not be advised in certain women, such as those with a history of hormone-related cancers.

Other options include non-hormonal creams (that you can buy from the pharmacist) or using water-based lubricants during sex.

Hot flashes

These can be difficult to control. Simple ways of coping with hot flashes include standing near an open window or keeping a small fan nearby. Wear light cotton clothing in layers and use cotton sheets to help let your skin breathe. Getting as much exercise as you can, or splashing cold water on the wrists when a hot flash starts, may also help.

Some women use acupuncture, homeopathy, evening primrose oil, vitamin E or plant estrogens (phytoestrogens). Research is needed to show whether there is evidence that these methods really help. If you're thinking about trying any of these therapies, talk to your doctor.

Your doctor may be able to prescribe drugs that can help reduce hot flashes. If hot flashes are a problem for you, ask whether drugs are appropriate.

What about HRT?

HRT (hormone replacement therapy) is one type of medication that can be used to relieve symptoms of menopause. The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that women avoid taking HRT (hormone replacement therapy) for any reason other than to relieve severe menopausal symptoms that have not responded to any other treatment.

Researchers now believe that the risks of long-term use of combined HRT (estrogen plus progesterone) outweigh the benefits for most women:

- The risks include an increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke and blood clots in the lungs.
- The benefits include relief of menopausal symptoms, protection against osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) and a reduced risk of colon cancer.

If you are thinking about taking HRT, your decision should be made with your doctor, based on the risks and benefits associated with taking it. If you and your doctor decide that taking combination HRT is right for you, the lowest effective dose should be used for the shortest period of time possible to control the menopausal symptoms for which it was started in the first place.

Feeling sad or depressed

It isn't uncommon to feel sad or depressed for some time after your treatment finishes. You may feel okay for a while and then start to feel down for a few weeks, months or even years later.

Feeling sad

Don't be surprised if you feel fed up and unhappy at times. With all that you've been through, nobody could blame you for feeling this way.

Knowing why you feel the way you do can help you to work through your feelings. Some people feel sad or depressed because of the changes cancer has caused. Others become very down because they are frightened about the future. Will the cancer come back? Will they be able to work again? How will the family get by if they can't earn any money?

Whatever it is that's making you feel down, it's important to get the support you need.

Signs of depression

There is a difference between feeling down and sad for a while and feeling depressed for long periods. Depression is much harder to shake and can go on for a long time if you don't get the right help. Some signs of depression can be caused by other medical conditions.

If you have one or more of these signs for a few weeks or more, see your doctor:

- feeling very sad and down most of the time
- not being able to enjoy life as you used to
- having negative thoughts about yourself a lot of the time
- changes in your eating habits - eating much more or less than usual
- weight gain or loss
- feeling very tired a lot of the time
- loss of concentration
- loss of interest in sex
- changes in sleep habits - not being able to fall asleep, waking in the early hours of the morning or sleeping more than usual
- feeling very anxious or upset
- feeling that you want to die or would like to kill yourself

These are not the only signs of depression. If you have some of these signs or think that you may be depressed, it's important to see your doctor. Be honest about how bad you feel. This will help your doctor and you make the right decisions about the type of support and care you need.

It takes a lot of courage to ask for help, and it's important to feel good about yourself and life again.

What help is available for depression?

There are lots of things that can help with depression - for example, professional counselling or psychotherapy. Antidepressant drugs

can make a dramatic difference for some people. Whatever works for you is all that matters.

Your doctor will be able to explain the difference between counselling and psychotherapy and between a counsellor, psychologist and psychiatrist. This information will help you to choose the support you need.

Ways to help yourself feel better

If you're feeling down, these suggestions may help. They might not make you feel instantly happy, but they may help you feel more in control and positive that things can get better.

- Take care of yourself. Eat a balanced diet with lots of vegetables and fruit and drink plenty of water.
- Get regular exercise. Many people say that being active helps lift their mood.
- Share your feelings with someone close to you. Having them know exactly how you feel can make you feel less alone.
- Try to push yourself to go out and do something you enjoy, even if you don't feel like it. A change of scenery can often make you feel better.
- Find ways to express yourself. Some people find that it helps to write down how they're feeling in a journal or on a blog. Others might find it easier to express themselves by painting, drawing or singing.
- Consider whether a complementary therapy such as massage, yoga, hypnosis, acupuncture and reflexology might help improve your mood. Talk to your doctor before trying any of these therapies.

Herbal products to treat depression

Over the past few years there has been a lot of interest in the use of herbal products to help treat depression. It is important to know that just because something is labelled "natural", it doesn't mean that it's safe. Some herbal products can have very serious side effects and may interact with other drugs that you are taking.

Two herbal products that have been given a lot of attention in the media as ways to treat depression are St. John's wort and Ginkgo biloba. Some research suggests that these herbs may help improve mood for some people. However, other research has not found this to be the case.

Both of these products have side effects and should not be taken with antidepressant drugs. Check with your doctor before using any herbal products. You'll want to be sure that they don't interfere with any other medicines you're taking and that they are safe for you to take following cancer treatment.

Fertility problems

Infertility can be a long-term or late effect of some cancer treatments. Infertility is the inability to conceive a child. For some people this is only temporary, but it can also be permanent.

Having children may not be a priority for some people - other long-term effects may be more difficult to deal with. Everyone is different and there is no right way to feel.

If having children is something that you've always wanted, fertility problems can be devastating. While you may have coped well with the news during treatment, you may find it very difficult to accept after treatment finishes.

Your age and whether or not you already have children can play a part in how you deal with the news of infertility. But even if you have children and were not planning to have any more, it may still make you feel strange to be told that you can't. You may feel a sense of loss. Perhaps you feel less feminine or manly. You may feel very angry, sad or anxious that cancer and its treatment caused these changes to your body.

If you are finding it hard to come to terms with infertility, it may help to speak with a counsellor.



Using complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are used *together with* conventional medical treatments. They may help people deal with the late and long-term effects of cancer treatment. Many people say that they have been helped by these therapies, but research is needed to understand if they are safe and effective.

Examples of complementary therapies include massage, reflexology, acupuncture, meditation and hypnotherapy. Some cancer survivors say that using complementary therapies helps them to:

- cope with some effects such as pain and fatigue
- relieve the stress of rebuilding their life
- relax and feel good again
- feel more in control of their situation

Many people find comfort in using these therapies. The touch, talk and time they are given from the therapist can be very reassuring. Others find that music or art therapy is very useful in helping them to express their feelings and remain positive about their future.

If you are considering a complementary therapy, let your doctor know. They may be able to recommend a therapy that is right for you. There may be situations when they advise against using a certain therapy. For example, deep tissue massage may not be safe if you have osteoporosis, a bleeding disorder or had bone problems during your cancer treatment.

Ask if the complementary therapist is a member of a recognized association. And let the therapist know that you've had cancer. A good complementary therapist will always encourage you to discuss any therapies with your doctor.



Living healthy after treatment

Many cancer survivors decide that they want to live a healthier lifestyle than they did before they got cancer. You may begin to look at eating a healthier diet, getting more exercise or trying to reduce the amount of stress in your life.

It is uncertain whether these changes will stop your cancer from coming back, but they can certainly help you feel better.

Develop a wellness plan

If you want to make some changes, your healthcare team can help you develop a wellness plan. It might include:

- ways to manage your healthcare
- tips to reduce stress in your life
- changes to your eating habits
- how much and what type of exercise to do

Just as your cancer treatment plan and experience were unique to you, your wellness plan will also be yours alone.

Manage your stress

The challenges and changes that cancer brings to life can make cancer survivors feel stressed and anxious, affecting their quality of life. Learning to relax your body and mind, even for short periods of time each day, can help you feel better, calmer and more in control. Relaxation can also help you deal with difficult emotions, pain and other symptoms. Books, DVDs and classes can teach you different self-help relaxation methods. To help reduce and manage stress in your life, you might:

- Try meditation or deep breathing exercises.
- Practise yoga, tai chi or another type of exercise or stretching.
- Seek support from someone else who's been through a similar cancer experience (either in a group or one-to-one).
- Get support from a counsellor.

Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke

If you're a smoker, and found it was too hard to quit during your treatment, you might think about doing so now. For most people, becoming a non-smoker is more of a process than an event. You're not alone if you need to try several times before you are successful.

You don't have to do this alone

When you're ready, the Canadian Cancer Society can help with our *One Step at a Time* quit guides. Smokers' helplines provide free, confidential assistance that can help you develop a quit program, offer you support and refer you to services in your community. To find out more:

- Call toll-free at 1 888 939-3333.
- E-mail us at info@cis.cancer.ca.
- Visit our website at cancer.ca.

Protect yourself from the sun

Having survived cancer, enjoying life outside may be even more important to you than it was before. No one is completely safe from the sun's harmful rays, but you can take extra care to protect yourself, particularly between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are at their strongest, or any time of the day when the UV Index is 3 or more. You can also:

- Cover up. Choose clothing that is loose fitting, tightly woven and lightweight. Don't forget your hat and sunglasses!
- Wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and SPF 30 if you work outdoors or will be outside for most of the day. Look for "broad spectrum", which offers protection against both UVA and UVB ultraviolet rays.
- Avoid indoor tanning equipment. Tanning lights and sun lamps release UV rays that can cause sunburn and damage skin and increase the risk of skin cancer.

Maintain a healthy body weight

Healthy bodies come in a range of weights, shapes and sizes. Some research suggests that maintaining a healthy body weight will reduce the chances of cancer coming back.

Talk to your doctor about what is a healthy weight for you, and ways to achieve or maintain it. For many people, losing weight and maintaining a healthy weight can be very hard. Eating a healthy diet and being active are good places to start.

Be active

Research has shown that physical activity may help improve quality of life and increase survival for some types of cancer. Being active can also help you maintain a healthy body weight, which some research suggests may reduce your risk of cancer coming back. Being fit and healthy also helps reduce your risk of other health problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Studies have also shown that moderate exercise can help:

- improve your mood
- make you feel better about yourself (boost your self-esteem)
- reduce symptoms of fatigue, sickness and pain

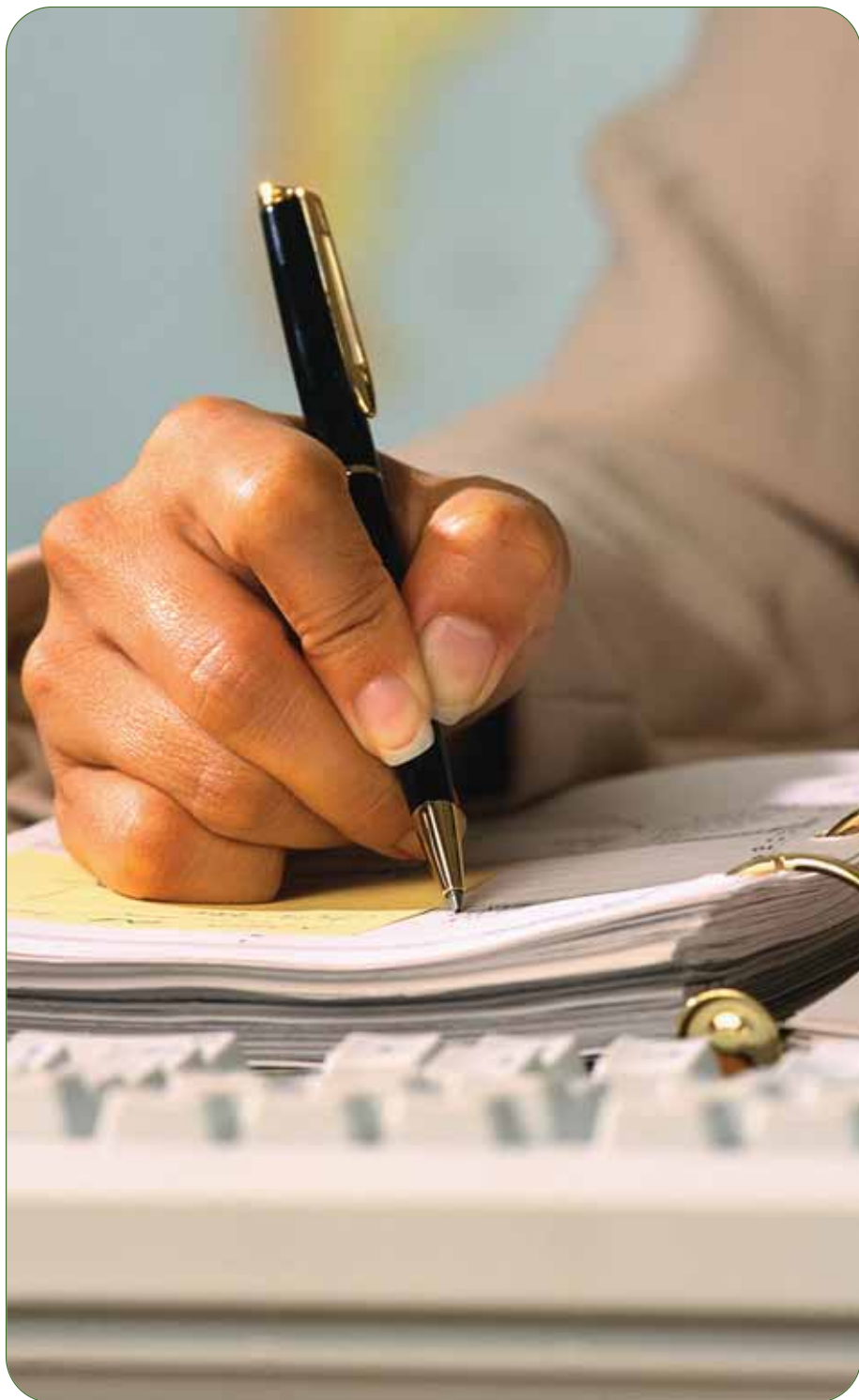
Always check with your doctor before you begin any exercise program. Don't take on more than your body is ready for, or something you're not going to enjoy. It's usually better to go slowly at first and increase your activity over time. Your body needs time to recover.

Eat a healthy diet

Research has shown that eating a healthy diet can help prevent some cancers from developing in the first place. As far as cancer coming back, some research does suggest that eating a healthy diet may prevent cancer from returning.

Following *Canada's Food Guide* is a great place to start. A dietitian or a member of your healthcare team may be able to guide you through what changes you might make to your eating habits. Eating well begins with eating a variety of foods each day to get the nutrients you need for good health. Making healthy food choices will help you eat healthier fats, more fibre and less salt and sugar. Your healthcare team will let you know about any food restrictions that you need to follow.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Research shows that drinking alcohol can increase the chances of developing certain cancers. Talk to your doctor about whether you should have any special concerns about drinking alcohol.



Dealing with practical issues

This section offers suggestions about where to go for help to deal with the practical problems you may be faced with after cancer.

Financial matters

During your treatment you were likely focused primarily on your health, but you may now have some questions that relate to financial matters. You may worry about how you might support yourself and your family if you aren't able to work for any length of time because of cancer, its treatment or because of disability.

Income

Cancer can affect your finances. You may have taken unpaid time away from work. Some people have to spend more money on medications or therapies not covered by provincial or private health insurance plans. You may want to talk to social workers at your cancer centre if your income has been affected by cancer.

You'll probably want to find out about financial assistance programs and government benefits, such as Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Disability Benefits. The CPP disability benefit is available to people who have made enough contributions to the CPP and whose disability prevents them from working at any job on a regular basis. The *Guide to Government of Canada Services for People with Disabilities* provides information on employment, health, income support and tax benefits.

Account managers at your bank, financial planners or advisors can help with budgeting money. They can also offer advice about whether to use equity from your home, RRSPs or other investments.

Insurance

Getting new insurance (life or travel) may be more difficult because you have had cancer. You will need to provide your medical history

for most insurance policies. For more information on group and individual life and health insurance plans in Canada, contact the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA). The social worker at your cancer centre may also have information on what you need to know about health insurance.

Preparing a will

If you don't already have a will, it's important to prepare one so that you can make sure your property and possessions go to the people or charities of your choice. If you don't have a will, your property and finances are settled according to federal and provincial laws.

Making a will doesn't have to be difficult or expensive. A lawyer with experience in wills can help you prepare one properly. You can always update or change your will by talking with your lawyer.

Working after treatment

Returning to your job

Some people may have stopped working during treatment. If cancer and its treatment have made it impossible for you to go back to your previous job, this can be very hard to accept. Some people may be able to retrain for a different occupation. This is a big commitment and may take a lot of courage and patience. Others may be physically able to return to their old job but not feel emotionally up to it.

Some cancer survivors want to take some time off from work after treatment and rethink what they would like to do with their life. Others are very keen to get back to work as soon as possible. They are happy to return to their normal routines and have the company and support of co-workers. For many, working is a sign that they are over their cancer. Some people have no choice but to return to work because of financial needs.

Talk to your healthcare team and your boss, employer or human resources manager about going back to work. Allow enough time to make a smooth transition. If possible, start off working part-time and gradually move up to full-time.

Sometimes a cancer survivor may have a functional problem or disability that requires a change in their job duties or work environment. Vocational rehabilitation counsellors can help when cancer treatment has affected your ability to return to work. These counsellors:

- assess a person's suitability for returning to work after cancer treatment
- make suggestions on alternative jobs or retraining
- help people with physical or functional limitations find a suitable job
- help people use special technology or tools to help them do their job
- serve as a liaison between the cancer survivor and employer if needed

Employee assistance programs (EAPs), disability insurance carriers or counselling departments in the cancer centre can provide information on how to find vocational rehabilitation counsellors.

What if I've been treated unfairly?

Most employers are very supportive of employing someone who has had cancer. But there are situations where this is not true and it can come as quite a shock. Survivors can protect themselves from employment discrimination by learning about their rights in the workplace. For example, an employer cannot treat you differently from other workers in job-related activities because of a cancer history, as long as you are qualified for the job. Employers have to reasonably accommodate changes, such as changes in work hours

or duties, to help you do your job after cancer treatment. However, they do not have to make changes that would be overly costly or disruptive.

Some employers may not want to hire someone who has had cancer. But it is against the law to discriminate against someone who has had cancer or has a physical disability. If you believe you have been unlawfully discriminated against because of a diagnosis of cancer, you should seek advice immediately. Contact the Human Rights Commission in your province or territory. They can help investigate and settle complaints of discrimination in the workplace.

Possible challenges with co-workers

If you return to your job, or start a new one, and people are aware that you have had cancer treatment, you may face some challenges.

Some colleagues may treat you differently. They may not know how to react and be frightened of hurting your feelings, so they will avoid saying anything at all. They may act like nothing has happened and take the attitude that you must be okay because you look well and seem to be able to do your job again. Others may ask you questions that you aren't ready to answer. You may feel angry, hurt and frustrated by people's reactions.

Often, the more relaxed and open you are about having had cancer, the more likely it will be that your co-workers respond to you in a way that feels right. If you're having trouble settling back into your work life, it may help to talk with a counsellor. Some workplaces will have someone on site that you can talk to. Or, your company's health benefits may include an employee assistance program (EAP) that offers individual counselling for employees.

What if I can no longer work?

If you can no longer work, this can be very stressful. You will most likely still need a regular income to pay bills, the mortgage or rent, and other living expenses.

It's important that you get the support and advice that you need. Find out about financial assistance programs and government benefits. You may qualify for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) disability benefit if you have a disability that prevents you from working at any job on a regular basis. The *Guide to Government of Canada Services for People with Disabilities* has information on employment, health, income support and tax benefits.

Some people find it useful to see a financial adviser or planner to discuss their financial concerns. Your bank may have a financial adviser you can talk to. The Financial Planners Standards Council (FPSC) has helpful information on finding a certified financial planner.

For information on government services

For information on government services and how to apply for them, contact your local Human Resources and Social Development Canada office at 1 800 0-Canada (1 800 622-6232) or visit www.servicecanada.ca.

Support for daily activities

Local community centres and organizations, such as Community Care and Meals on Wheels, provide a range of community and in-home services, including meals, housekeeping and respite care.

To find out more about what's offered in your area, you can search our Community Services Directory on www.cancer.ca, or call one of our information specialists at 1 888 939-3333 for help. Our directory lists over 4000 cancer-related services offered by the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations. We can help you find one that suits your needs.



Other resources about life after cancer

There are a number of resources that offer support and information available for cancer survivors. Survivorship programs, support groups, professional counselling and other resources are available to help people adjust to life after cancer.

Canadian Cancer Society

Our information specialists take time to answer your questions over the telephone and search for the information you need. Even after treatment, you may still have questions about cancer or recovery. Through our Community Services Directory, we can help you find services and programs in your community that are offered by the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations.

To contact the Canadian Cancer Society:

- Call us toll-free at **1 888 939-3333** Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- E-mail us at **info@cis.cancer.ca**.
- Visit our website at **cancer.ca**.
- Contact your local Canadian Cancer Society office.

Our services are free and confidential.



Suggested websites

Caring Voices

www.caringvoices.ca

An interactive online support community of cancer survivors.

Cancer Survivors Network – American Cancer Society

www.acscsn.org

The Cancer Survivors Network (CSN) is an online community of cancer survivors, families and friends who share their experience, strength and hope.

Office of Cancer Survivorship – National Cancer Institute

www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/ocs/office-survivorship.html

The Office of Cancer Survivorship (OCS) was developed for people surviving cancer, with their unique needs in mind. Tools such as the Facing Forward Series: Life after Cancer Treatment are available for cancer survivors and their families through OCS.

CancerCare

www.cancercares.org

CancerCare offers counselling to survivors and their families. CancerCare also offers free telephone education workshops, where cancer survivors and their families can listen to experts speak about a range of survivorship topics.

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)

www.canceradvocacy.org

The NCCS is a network of groups and people that offer support to cancer survivors and their loved ones. NCCS provides information and resources on cancer support, advocacy, and quality of life issues. A Cancer Survival Toolbox – an audio program to help cancer survivors and caregivers deal with the diagnosis, treatment and challenges of cancer – is available through NCCS.

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What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer, our services or to make a donation.



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

Let's Make Cancer History

1 888 939-3333 | cancer.ca

TTY 1 866 786-3934

This is general information developed by the Canadian Cancer Society.
It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider.

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