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After Lung Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

- [Living as a Lung Cancer Survivor](#)

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it is very common to have questions about cancer coming back or treatment no longer working.

- [Second Cancers After Lung Cancer](#)

Living as a Lung Cancer Survivor

For some people with lung cancer, treatment may remove or destroy the cancer. Completing treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but find it hard not to worry about cancer growing or coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, lung cancer may never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to try to control the cancer for as long as possible. Learning to live with cancer that does not go

away can be difficult and very stressful.

Follow-up care

If you have completed treatment, your doctors will still want to watch you closely. It's very important to go to all of your follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask if you are having any problems and may do exams and lab tests or imaging tests to look for signs of cancer returning or treatment [side effects](#)¹.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some might only last for a few days or weeks, but others might last a long time. Some side effects might not even show up until years after you have finished treatment. Your doctor visits are a good time to ask questions and talk about any changes or problems you notice or concerns you have.

For all lung cancer survivors, it's important to let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer [coming back](#)² or by a new disease or a [second cancer](#)³.

Doctor visits and tests

In people with no signs of cancer remaining, many doctors recommend follow-up visits (which may include CT scans and blood tests) about every 3 months for the first couple of years after treatment, about every 6 months for the next several years, then at least yearly after 5 years. Some doctors may advise different follow-up schedules.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)⁴ for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up [exams and tests](#)⁵
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what to watch for and when you should contact your doctor
- A schedule for other tests you might need to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- Suggestions for things you can do that might improve your health, including possibly lowering your chances of the cancer coming back

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep [health insurance](#)⁶. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think of their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to [keep copies of your medical records](#)⁷ to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment.

Can I lower the risk of my cancer progressing or coming back?

Staying as healthy as possible is more important than ever after lung cancer treatment. Quitting smoking and eating right may help you lower the risk of your lung cancer coming back, and may help protect you from other health problems.

Quitting smoking

If you smoke, quitting is important. Quitting has been shown to help people with lung cancer live longer, even if the cancer has spread. It also lowers the chance of getting another lung cancer, which is especially important for people with early-stage lung cancer.

Of course, quitting smoking can have other health benefits as well, including lowering your risk of some other cancers. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

Diet, nutrition, and dietary supplements

The possible link between diet and lung cancer growing or coming back is much less clear. Some studies have suggested that diets high in fruits and vegetables might help prevent lung cancer from developing in the first place, but this hasn't been studied in people who already have lung cancer.

Some early studies have suggested that people with early-stage lung cancer who have higher vitamin D levels might have better outcomes, but so far no study has shown that taking extra vitamin D (as a supplement) helps. On the other hand, studies have found that beta carotene supplements may actually increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers. Another study has shown that men (especially smokers) who took high amounts of vitamin B6 or B12 supplements for a long time had an increased risk of lung cancer.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that could be harmful.

If the cancer comes back

If cancer does return at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is, what treatments you've had before, and your health. Surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or some combination of these might be options. Other types of treatment might also be used to help relieve any symptoms from the cancer.

For more on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices for Small Cell Lung Cancer, by Stage](#)⁸ or [Treatment Choices for Non-small Cell Lung Cancer, by Stage](#)⁹. For more general information on dealing with a recurrence, you may also want to read [Coping With Cancer Recurrence](#)¹¹.

Second cancers after treatment

People who've had lung cancer can still get other cancers. Lung cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting another lung cancer, as well as some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Lung Cancer](#).

Getting emotional support

It is normal to feel [depressed, anxious, or worried](#)¹² when small cell lung cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from [help and support](#)¹³ from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)¹⁴.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence/coping-with-cancer-recurrence.html

3. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html
4. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
5. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests.html
6. www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/managing-your-health-insurance.html
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12. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/emotional-side-effects.html
13. www.cancer.org/treatment/support-programs-and-services.html
14. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment.html

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Second Cancers After Lung Cancer

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often a major concern is facing cancer again. Cancer that comes back after treatment is called a [recurrence](#)¹. But some cancer survivors develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a **second cancer**.

Unfortunately, being treated for lung cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had lung cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, they might be at higher risk for certain types of cancer.

Survivors of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and small cell lung cancer (SCLC) can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- A second lung cancer (This is different from the first cancer coming back.)
- [Cancer of the larynx \(voice box\)](#)²
- [Cancer of the mouth and throat](#)³
- [Esophagus cancer](#)⁴
- [Pancreas cancer](#)⁵

- [Bladder cancer](#)⁶
- [Thyroid cancer](#)⁷
- [Acute myeloid leukemia \(AML\)](#)⁸

NSCLC survivors also have a higher risk of developing these cancers:

- [Stomach cancer](#)⁹
- [Small intestine cancer](#)¹⁰
- [Colon cancer](#)¹¹
- [Rectal cancer](#)¹²
- [Cancer of the kidney and renal pelvis](#)¹³

Lung cancer is the most common second cancer in someone with a previous lung cancer. Smoking is a risk factor for many of these cancers, and the risks of a second cancer are especially high among lung cancer survivors who continue to smoke. The risk of cancer of the esophagus is higher among people treated with radiation therapy to the chest.

Follow-up after lung cancer treatment

After completing treatment for lung cancer, you should still see your doctor regularly to look for any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer coming back, or by a new disease or second cancer.

Lung cancer survivors should also follow the [American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer](#)¹⁴, such as those for colorectal, breast, cervical, and prostate cancer. Screening tests can find some cancers early, when they are likely to be easier to treat. For people who have had lung cancer, most experts don't recommend any additional testing to look for second cancers unless you have symptoms.

Can I lower my risk of getting a second cancer?

There are steps you can take to lower your risk and stay as healthy as possible. For example, people who have had lung cancer should do their best to [stay away from tobacco products](#)¹⁵. Smoking increases the risk of dying from lung cancer, as well as the risk of many of the second cancers seen after lung cancer.

To help maintain good health, lung cancer survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)¹⁶
- Keep [physically active](#)¹⁷
- Eat a [healthy diet](#)¹⁸, with an emphasis on plant foods
- Limit [alcohol](#)¹⁹ to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some other health problems.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)²⁰ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/laryngeal-and-hypopharyngeal-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/esophagus-cancer.html
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19. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
20. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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