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## After Anal Cancer Treatment

### Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- [Living as an Anal 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 Anal Cancer](#)

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## Living as an Anal Cancer Survivor

For many people with anal cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may need to get treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that doesn't go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Life after cancer means returning to some familiar things and also making some new choices.

## Follow-up care

When treatment ends, 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 questions about any problems you may have and will do a physical exam, which will include a rectal exam, an exam of the anus, and an exam to see if any nearby [lymph nodes](#)<sup>1</sup> are enlarged. Blood tests and imaging tests such as [CT scans](#)<sup>2</sup> may also be ordered.

Almost any cancer treatment can have [side effects](#)<sup>3</sup>. Some may last for a few weeks to months, but others can last the rest of your life. This is the time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes or problems you notice and any questions or concerns you have.

Follow-up doctor visits after treatment may be as often as every 3 months for at least 2 years, and then maybe less often as time goes on.

Close follow-up is very important in the first several months after treatment with chemoradiation, especially if not all of the cancer is gone. Some tumors continue to shrink after treatment, so the doctor will want to watch the cancer closely during this time to see if more treatment might still be needed.

## For patients with colostomies

Most people treated for anal cancer don't need extensive surgery (known as an abdominoperineal resection, or APR). But if you do have an APR, you will need to have a permanent colostomy.

If you have a colostomy, follow-up is important. You might feel worried or isolated from normal activities. A wound, ostomy, continence nurse (WOCN) or enterostomal therapist (a health care professional trained to help people with their colostomies) can teach you how to care for your colostomy. You can also ask the American Cancer Society about programs offering information and support in your area. See our [colostomy information](#)<sup>4</sup> to learn more.

## Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a survivorship care plan for you. This plan might

include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as early detection (screening) tests for other types of cancer, or tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- 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
- Diet and physical activity suggestions
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

### **Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records**

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep [health insurance](#)<sup>5</sup>. 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 to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records](#)<sup>6</sup>.

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

If you have (or have had) anal cancer, you probably want to know if there are things you can do that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as exercising, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements. Unfortunately, it's not yet clear if there are things you can do that will help.

Adopting healthy behaviors such as [not smoking](#)<sup>7</sup>, [eating well](#)<sup>8</sup>, [getting regular physical activity](#)<sup>9</sup>, and [staying at a healthy weight](#)<sup>10</sup> might help, but no one knows for sure. However, we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of anal cancer or other cancers.

### **About dietary supplements**

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)<sup>11</sup> (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of anal cancer progressing or coming

back. This doesn't mean that no supplements will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

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 might be harmful.

### **If the cancer comes back**

If the cancer does recur at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is located, what treatments you've had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment of Anal Cancer, by Stage](#)<sup>12</sup>.

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)<sup>13</sup>.

### **Could I get a second cancer after treatment?**

People who've had anal cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, anal cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Anal Cancer](#).

### **Getting emotional support**

Some amount of feeling depressed, anxious, or worried is normal when cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from help and support from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)<sup>14</sup>.

### **Hyperlinks**

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-basics/lymph-nodes-and-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-basics/lymph-nodes-and-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/ct-scan-for-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/ct-scan-for-cancer.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/colostomy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/colostomy.html)

5. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html)
12. [www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer/treating/by-stage.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer/treating/by-stage.html)
13. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html)
14. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html)

## References

See all references for Anal Cancer ([www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer/references.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer/references.html))

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# Second Cancers After Anal Cancer

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often their greatest concern is facing cancer again. If a cancer comes back after treatment it is called a “recurrence.” But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a “second cancer.” No matter what type of cancer you have had, it is still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Unfortunately, being treated for cancer doesn’t mean you can’t get another cancer. People who have had cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can be linked to a higher risk

of certain second cancers.

Survivors of anal cancer can still get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of

- [Cancer of the tongue](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Cancer of the tonsil](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [Vaginal cancer](#)<sup>3</sup>
- [Vulvar cancer](#)<sup>4</sup>
- [Lung cancer](#)<sup>5</sup>
- [Kaposi sarcoma](#)<sup>6</sup>

Patients diagnosed with anal cancer before age 50 also have an increased risk of [non-Hodgkin lymphoma](#)<sup>7</sup>.

Anal cancer is linked to infection with [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#)<sup>8</sup>, and many of these cancers (cancers of the tongue, tonsil, vulva, and vagina) are also linked to HPV infection.

### **Follow-up after treatment**

After completing treatment for anal cancer, you should see your doctor regularly to look for signs that the cancer has come back or spread. Experts do not recommend any additional testing to look for second cancers in patients without symptoms. Let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer coming back or by a new disease or second cancer.

Survivors of anal cancer should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)<sup>9</sup> and [stay away from tobacco products](#)<sup>10</sup>. Smoking increases the risk of many cancers and might further increase the risk of many of the second cancers seen after anal cancer.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)<sup>11</sup>
- Keep [physically active](#)<sup>12</sup> and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)<sup>13</sup> that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods.
- It's best not to drink [alcohol](#)<sup>14</sup>. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for

women or 2 per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some cancers.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)<sup>15</sup> for more information about causes of second cancers.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/vulvar-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/vulvar-cancer.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/kaposi-sarcoma.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/kaposi-sarcoma.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/non-hodgkin-lymphoma.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/non-hodgkin-lymphoma.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html)
12. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html)
13. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html)
14. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html)
15. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html)

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