



# After Bladder Cancer Treatment

## Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

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

## Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it is very common to have concerns about developing a second cancer after treatment.

- [Second Cancers After Bladder Cancer](#)

## Living as a Bladder Cancer Survivor

For some people with bladder cancer, treatment can 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 coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, bladder cancer might never go away completely or might come back in another part of the body. These people might get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to help keep the cancer in check for as long as possible. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

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

## 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

## Typical follow-up schedules after bladder cancer

If you have completed treatment, your doctors will still want to watch you closely. People who have had bladder cancer have a high risk of developing a second bladder cancer, so 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 are having and may do exams and lab tests or imaging tests to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects.

Some treatment side effects might last a long time or 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.

### Doctor visits and tests

Your schedule of exams and tests will depend on the original extent and [grade](#) of your cancer, what treatments you've had, and other factors. Be sure to follow your doctor's advice about follow-up tests.

Most experts recommend repeat exams every 3 to 6 months for people who have no signs of cancer remaining to see if the cancer is growing back or if there is a new cancer in the urinary system. A typical follow-up plan includes urine cytology, a general physical exam, imaging tests, and routine blood tests.

If your bladder hasn't been removed, regular cystoscopy exams will be part of the plan as well. (For more on these tests, see [Tests for bladder cancer](#).) The time between

doctor visits may be extended after a few years if no new cancers are seen.

Some doctors recommend other lab tests as well, such as the urine tumor marker tests discussed in [Can bladder cancer be found early?](#). Many of these tests can be used to help see if the cancer is coming back, but so far none of these can take the place of cystoscopy.

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

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep [health insurance](#). 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 Health Insurance Records When Someone Has Cancer](#).

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

If you have (or have had) bladder 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. But because bladder cancer often comes back or new bladder cancers develop, this is an active area of study. Clinical trials are now looking to see if certain vitamins, minerals, dietary supplements, or medicines might lower the risk of bladder cancer returning (see [What's new in bladder cancer research and treatment?](#)).

Adopting healthy behaviors such as not smoking, eating well, being active, and staying at a healthy weight might help as well, 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 cancer.

### **About dietary supplements**

So far, no dietary supplements (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of bladder 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 are 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 your cancer does come back at some point, your treatment options will depend on the location of the cancer and what treatments you've had before. Options might include surgery, intravesical therapy, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or some combination of these. For more on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment of bladder cancer, by stage](#). For more general information on dealing with a recurrence, you might also want to see the section of our website [Understanding Recurrence](#).

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

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

## **Moving on after bladder cancer**

### **For patients with a urostomy**

If you had a radical cystectomy and now have a urostomy, you might worry even about everyday activities at first. You might have to alter some of your daily (and nightly) routines because of changes in how you urinate. Other issues such as having sex might also cause concerns (see below).

It's normal to have worries and concerns when adjusting to such a major change, but

it's important to know there are health care professionals who are specially trained to help people with their urostomies. They can teach you to take care of your urostomy and help you cope with the changes it brings. You can also ask the American Cancer Society about programs offering information and support in your area. For more information, see [Urostomy Guide](#).

## Emotional support

Some amount of feeling depressed, anxious, or worried is normal when bladder 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.

## Sexuality and feeling good about your body

Bladder cancer treatment can often affect sexual function. (See [Bladder cancer surgery](#) for more on this.) Learning to be comfortable with your body during and after bladder cancer treatment is a personal journey, one that is different for everyone. Information and support can help you cope with these changes over time. Learn more in [Sexuality for the Man With Cancer](#) or [Sexuality for the Woman With Cancer](#).

- [References](#)

[See all references for Bladder Cancer](#)

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# Second Cancers After Bladder Cancer

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often a major 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*.

Unfortunately, being treated for bladder cancer doesn't mean you can't get another

cancer. People who have had bladder 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 bladder cancer can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of certain cancers, including:

- A second bladder cancer (This is different from the first cancer coming back.)
- Cancer of the renal pelvis/ureter (the ureter is the tube connecting the kidney to the bladder; the part of the kidney where it attaches is called the renal pelvis)
- [Cancer of the pancreas](#)
- [Cancer of the larynx](#) (voice box)
- [Lung cancer](#)
- [Vaginal cancer](#)
- [Prostate cancer](#)
- [Kidney cancer](#)
- [Acute myeloid leukemia \(AML\)](#)

Many of these cancers are linked to smoking, which is a major risk factor for bladder cancer.

## Follow-up after bladder cancer treatment

After completing treatment for bladder cancer, you should see your doctor regularly. Let them 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.

Bladder cancer survivors should also follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#), such as those for colorectal and lung cancer. Most experts don't recommend any other 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, it's important to [stay away from tobacco products](#). Smoking increases the risk of some of the second cancers seen after bladder cancer, as well as many other cancers.

To help [maintain good health](#), bladder cancer survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Stay physically active
- Eat a healthy diet, with an emphasis on plant foods
- Limit alcohol 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](#) for more information about causes of second cancers.

- [References](#)

[See all references for Bladder Cancer](#)

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