After Bone Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

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The information here focuses on primary bone cancers (cancers that start in bones) that most often are seen in adults. Information on Osteosarcoma, Ewing Tumors (Ewing sarcomas), and Bone Metastasis is covered separately.

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

For some other people, the cancer might never go away completely. They might get regular treatments to help keep the cancer in check for as long as possible and to prevent or limit any problems it might cause. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Follow-up care
Even if you’ve 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 about any problems you might be having and may do exams and order lab or imaging tests to look for signs that the cancer might have come back.

Exams and tests will probably be done every 3 to 6 months for the first few years, but as time goes on, the time between scans and visits may get longer. Because many types of primary bone tumors can come back even years after treatment, you might need regular imaging tests for many years.

Your doctors will also look for treatment side effects. Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some might last for only a short time, but others can last longer. Your doctor visits are a good time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes you notice or any problems or concerns you have.

After bone surgery, fitting for a prosthetic limb, rehabilitation, and/or physical therapy might be important to help you regain as much of your independence and ability to move as possible. For more on this, see Surgery for Bone Cancer.

**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, who will monitor your general health care

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

As much as you might want to put the experience behind you once treatment is completed, it’s also very important to keep good records of your medical care during this
time. Gathering these details soon after treatment may be easier than trying to get them at some point in the future. This can be very helpful later on if you change doctors. Learn more in Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records.

It’s also very important to keep health insurance coverage. Tests and doctor visits can cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think of the tumor coming back, this could happen.

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

If you have (or have had) primary bone 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, eating well, getting regular physical activity, and staying at a healthy weight might help, but no one knows for sure. Still, we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your overall health beyond your risk of bone cancer or other cancers.

**About dietary supplements**

So far, no dietary supplements (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of bone 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 come back (recur) at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is located, what treatments you’ve had before, and your overall health. For more information, see Treating Specific Types of Bone Cancers.

For more general information, see Understanding Recurrence.
Could I get a second cancer after treatment?

People who’ve had bone cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, bone cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer.

Survivors of bone cancer have an increased risk of getting another bone cancer. (This is different from the first cancer coming back.) Sometimes this is the same kind of cancer as the original tumor, but it can also be a different type.

Survivors of bone cancer also have an increased risk of:

- **Soft tissue sarcoma**\(^{18}\)
- **Lung cancer**\(^{19}\)
- **Esophagus cancer**\(^{20}\)
- **Stomach cancer**\(^{21}\)
- **Colorectal cancer**\(^{22}\)
- **Liver cancer**\(^{23}\)
- **Pancreas cancer**\(^{24}\)
- **Acute myeloid leukemia**\(^{25}\) (AML)

The risk of leukemia is linked to treatment with chemotherapy.

Experts don’t recommend any additional screening tests to look for second cancers in people who’ve had bone cancer. Still, it’s important to let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems you have, because they could be caused by the bone cancer coming back, or by a new disease or second cancer.

Like other people, survivors of bone cancer should follow the American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer\(^{26}\) and should stay away from tobacco products\(^{27}\), which increase the risk of many types of cancer.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also\(^{28}\):

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Keep physically active and limit the time spent sitting or lying down.
- Follow a healthy eating pattern that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods.
- Avoid or limit alcohol. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men.
These steps may also help lower the risk of some other health problems.

See Second Cancers in Adults for more information about second cancers.

Hyperlinks

5. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
27. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html

References


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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.