



After Cervical Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- [Living As A Cervical Cancer Survivor](#)

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it is very common to worry about risk for another cancer, cancer coming back, or treatment no longer working.

- [Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Cervical Cancer?](#)
- [If Treatment for Cervical Cancer Stops Working](#)

Living As A Cervical Cancer Survivor

For some women with cervical cancer, treatment may remove or destroy the cancer. Completing treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You'll be relieved to finish treatment, yet it's hard not to [worry about the cancer coming back](#). This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other women, the cancer may never go away completely. These women may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to try to help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Life after cervical 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 cervical cancer

Even if you have completed treatment, you will probably have follow-up visits with your doctor for many years. 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 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.

To some extent, the frequency of follow up visits and tests will depend on the [stage](#) of your cancer and the chance of it coming back.

Doctor visits

Your doctor will probably recommend you have a physical exam every 3 to 6 months for the first couple of years after treatment, then every 6 months or so for the next few years. People who were treated for early-stage cancers may need exams less often.

Most doctors recommend that women treated for cervical cancer keep getting regular Pap tests no matter how they were treated (surgery or radiation). Although cells for a Pap test are normally from the cervix, if you no longer have a cervix (because you had a trachelectomy or hysterectomy), the cells will be taken from the upper part of the vagina.

Imaging tests

Whether or not your doctor recommends imaging tests will depend on the stage of your cancer and other factors. CT scans may be done if you have worrisome symptoms of the cancer coming back.

Survivors of cervical cancer should also follow the American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer, such as those for breast, lung, and colorectal cancer.

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 Copies of Important Medical Records](#).

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

If you have (or have had) cervical 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. At this time, it's not yet clear if those things will help.

It is known that smoking is linked to an increased risk of cervical cancer. While it's not clear if smoking can affect cervical cancer growth or recurrence, it is still helpful to stop smoking to decrease your risk of getting another smoking related cancer (see [Can I get another cancer after having cervical cancer?](#)). Not smoking can also help you tolerate chemotherapy and radiation better and decrease further damage to the cells of the cervix or cervical area.

Adopting other healthy behaviors such as eating well, getting regular physical activity, and staying at a healthy weight 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 cervical 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 cervical 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.

- [References](#)

[See all references for Cervical Cancer](#)

Last Medical Review: November 16, 2016 Last Revised: December 5, 2016

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Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Cervical 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. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a second cancer.

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

- [Cancers of the mouth and throat](#)
- [Cancer of the larynx \(voice box\)](#)
- [Anal cancer](#)
- [Acute myeloid leukemia](#)
- [Vulvar cancer](#)
- [Vaginal cancer](#)
- [Lung cancer](#)
- [Cancers of the bladder and ureter](#)
- [Stomach cancer](#)
- [Colorectal cancer](#)
- [Pancreas cancer](#)

Many of these cancers are linked to [smoking](#) and/or infection with the [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#), which are also strongly linked to cervical cancer.

The increased risks of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) and cancers of the rectum, bladder, and soft tissue seem to be linked to treatment with radiation.

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, women who have had cervical cancer should do their best to stay away from tobacco products. Smoking might further increase the risk of some of the second cancers that are more common after cervical cancer.

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

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)
- Keep physically active
- Eat a [healthy diet](#), with an emphasis on plant foods
- Limit [alcohol](#) to no more than 1 drink per day

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.

Getting emotional support

Some amount of feeling depressed, anxious, or worried is normal when cervical cancer is a part of your life. Some women 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 Coping With Cancer.](#)

- [References](#)

[See all references for Cervical Cancer](#)

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If Treatment for Cervical Cancer Stops Working

If cancer keeps growing or comes back after one kind of treatment, it is possible that another treatment plan might still cure the cancer, or at least shrink it enough to help you live longer and feel better. But when a person has tried many different treatments and has not gotten any better, the cancer tends to become resistant to all treatment. If this happens, it's important to weigh the possible limited benefits of a new treatment against the possible downsides. Everyone has their own way of looking at this.

This is likely to be the hardest part of your battle with cancer when you have been through many medical treatments and nothing's working anymore. Your doctor might offer you new options, but at some point you may need to consider that treatment is not likely to improve your health or change your outcome or survival.

If you want to continue to get treatment for as long as you can, you need to think about the odds of treatment having any benefit and how this compares to the possible risks and [side effects](#). In many cases, your doctor can estimate how likely it is the cancer will respond to treatment you are considering. For instance, the doctor may say that more chemo or radiation might have about a 1% chance of working. Some people are still tempted to try this. But it is important to think about and understand your reasons for choosing this plan.

No matter what you decide to do, you need to feel as good as you can. Make sure you are asking for and getting treatment for any symptoms you might have, such as nausea or [pain](#). This type of treatment is called [palliative care](#).

Palliative care helps relieve symptoms, but is not expected to cure the disease. It can be given along with cancer treatment, or can even be cancer treatment. The difference is its purpose. The main purpose of palliative care is to improve the quality of your life, or help you feel as good as you can for as long as you can. Sometimes this means using drugs to help with symptoms like pain or nausea. Sometimes, though, the treatments used to control your symptoms are the same as those used to treat cancer. For instance, radiation might be used to help relieve bone pain caused by cancer that has spread to the bones. Or chemo might be used to help shrink a tumor and keep it from blocking the bowels. But this is not the same as treatment to try to cure the cancer.

At some point, you may benefit from hospice care. This is special care that treats the person rather than the disease; it focuses on quality rather than length of life. Most of the time, it is given at home. Your cancer may be causing problems that need to be managed, and hospice focuses on your comfort. You should know that while getting hospice care often means the end of treatments such as chemo and radiation, it doesn't mean you can't have treatment for the problems caused by your cancer or other health conditions. In hospice the focus of your care is on living life as fully as possible and feeling as well as you can at this difficult time. You can learn more in [Hospice Care](#) and [Nearing the End of Life](#).

Staying hopeful is important, too. Your hope for a cure may not be as bright, but there is still hope for good times with family and friends times that are filled with happiness and meaning. Pausing at this time in your cancer treatment gives you a chance to refocus on the most important things in your life. Now is the time to do some things you've always wanted to do and to stop doing the things you no longer want to do. Though the cancer may be beyond your control, there are still choices you can make.

- [References](#)

[See all references for Cervical Cancer](#)

Last Medical Review: September 19, 2014 Last Revised: January 29, 2016

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