After Gallbladder Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- What Happens After Treatment for Gallbladder Cancer?
- Lifestyle Changes After Having Gallbladder Cancer
- How Might Having Gallbladder Cancer Affect Your Emotional Health?

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.

- If Treatment for Gallbladder Cancer Stops Working

What Happens After Treatment for Gallbladder Cancer?

For some people with gallbladder 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 growing or coming back. (When cancer comes back after treatment, it is called recurrence.) This is a very common concern in people who have had cancer.

It may take a while before your fears lessen. But it may help to know that many cancer survivors have learned to live with this uncertainty and are living full lives. See Living With Uncertainty: The Fear of Cancer Recurrence for more about this.
For other people, the cancer may never go away completely. These people may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to try to help keep the cancer under control and help relieve symptoms from it. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful. It has its own type of uncertainty. See When Cancer Doesn't Go Away for more about this.

**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 follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask about symptoms, do physical exams, and may order blood tests or imaging tests such as CT scans.

If you have had surgery and have no signs of cancer remaining, many doctors recommend follow-up with imaging tests about every 6 months for at least the first 2 years, but not all doctors may follow this same schedule. Follow-up is needed to check for cancer recurrence or spread, as well as possible side effects of certain treatments.

This is the time for you to ask your healthcare team any questions you need answered and to discuss any concerns you might have.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some may last for a few weeks to months, but others can last the rest of your life. Don’t hesitate to tell your cancer care team about any symptoms or side effects bothering you so they can help you manage them.

Even if your cancer treatment is finished, you will probably still need to see your cancer doctor for many years. Ask what kind of follow-up schedule you can expect.

It’s also 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.

If cancer does recur, further treatment will depend on where the cancer is, what treatments you’ve had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see “Treatment options based on the extent of gallbladder cancer.” For more general information on dealing with a recurrence, you may also want to see When Your Cancer Comes Back: Cancer Recurrence.

**Seeing a new doctor**
At some point after your treatment, you may be seeing a new doctor who doesn’t know anything about your medical history. It’s important to able to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Gathering these details soon after treatment may be easier than trying to get them at some point in the future. Make sure you have this information handy (and always keep copies for yourself):

- A copy of your pathology report(s) from any biopsies or surgeries
- Copies of imaging tests (CT or MRI scans, etc.), which can usually be stored digitally (on a DVD, etc.)
- If you had surgery, a copy of your operative report(s)
- If you stayed in the hospital, a copy of the discharge summary that the doctor wrote when you were sent home
- If you had radiation therapy, a copy of the treatment summary
- If you had chemotherapy, a list of your drugs, drug doses, and when you took them
- The names and contact information of the doctors who treated your cancer

References

See all references for Gallbladder Cancer

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make you healthier? Maybe you could try to eat better or get more exercise. Maybe you could cut down on alcohol, or give up tobacco. Even things like keeping your stress level under control may help. Now is a good time to think about making changes that can have positive effects for the rest of your life. You will feel better and you will also be healthier.

You can start by working on those things that worry you most. Get help with those that are harder for you. For instance, if you are thinking about quitting smoking and need help, call the American Cancer Society for information and support. Our tobacco cessation and coaching service can help increase your chances of quitting for good.

**Eating better**

Eating right can be hard for anyone, but it can get even tougher during and after cancer treatment. This is especially true for cancers of the gallbladder. The cancer or its treatment may affect your appetite or alter how you digest foods. Nausea can be a problem. You may not feel like eating and lose weight when you don’t want to. All of these things can be very frustrating.

If treatment causes weight changes or eating or taste problems, do the best you can and keep in mind that these problems usually get better over time. You may find it helps to eat small portions every 2 to 3 hours until you feel better.

If eating problems last a long time, your doctor may have you see a nutritionist, who can work with you and give you information about your individual nutritional needs. They might recommend that you use nutritional supplements, which can help you maintain your weight and nutritional intake. For serious nutrition problems, the doctor might need to put a feeding tube into the stomach to improve nutrition and energy levels. This is usually temporary. For more information and nutrition tips for during and after cancer treatment, see [Nutrition for the Person With Cancer During Treatment: A Guide for Patients and Families](#).

**Rest, fatigue, and exercise**

Extreme tiredness, called fatigue, is very common in people treated for cancer. This is not a normal tiredness, but a bone-weary exhaustion that often doesn’t get better with rest. For some people, fatigue lasts a long time after treatment, and can make it hard for them to be active and do other things they want to do. But exercise can help reduce fatigue. Studies have shown that patients who follow an exercise program tailored to their personal needs feel better physically and emotionally and can cope better, too.
If you were sick and not very active during treatment, it's normal for your fitness, endurance, and muscle strength to decline. Any plan for physical activity should fit your own situation. If you haven’t been active in a few years, you will have to start slowly – maybe just by taking short walks.

Talk with your healthcare team before starting anything. Get their opinion about your exercise plans. Then, try to find an exercise buddy so you’re not doing it alone. Having family or friends involved when starting a new activity program can give you that extra boost of support to keep you going when the push just isn’t there.

If you are very tired, you will need to learn to balance activity with rest. It's OK to rest when you need to. Sometimes it’s really hard for people to allow themselves to rest when they are used to working all day or taking care of a household, but this is not the time to push yourself too hard. Listen to your body and rest when you need to. For more information on dealing with fatigue, see Fatigue in People With Cancer and Anemia in People With Cancer.

Keep in mind exercise can improve your physical and emotional health.

- It improves your cardiovascular (heart and circulation) fitness.
- Along with a good diet, it will help you get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- It makes your muscles stronger.
- It reduces fatigue and helps you have more energy.
- It can help lower anxiety and depression.
- It can make you feel happier.
- It helps you feel better about yourself.

Getting regular physical activity also plays a role in helping to lower the risk of some cancers, as well as having other health benefits.

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

Most people want to know if they can make certain lifestyle changes to reduce their risk of cancer progressing or coming back. Unfortunately, for most cancers there isn’t much solid evidence to guide people. This doesn’t mean that nothing will help — it’s just that for the most part this is an area that hasn’t been well studied. Most studies have looked at lifestyle changes as ways of preventing cancer in the first place, not slowing it down or preventing it from coming back.

At this time, not enough is known about gallbladder cancer to say for sure if there are
things you can do that will help. Healthy behaviors such as not smoking, eating well, and staying at a healthy weight might help, but no one knows for sure. But we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of gallbladder cancer or other cancers.

So far, no dietary supplements have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of gallbladder cancer progressing or coming back. Again, this doesn’t mean that none will help, but it’s important to know that none have been proven to do so.

- References
  See all references for Gallbladder Cancer

How Might Having Gallbladder Cancer Affect Your Emotional Health?

During and after treatment, you may find yourself overcome with many different emotions. This happens to a lot of people.

You may find yourself thinking about death and dying. Or maybe you’re more aware of the effect the cancer has on your family, friends, and career. You may take a new look at your relationships with those around you. Unexpected issues may also cause concern. For instance, you might be stressed by financial concerns resulting from your treatment. You might also see your health care team less often after treatment and have more time on your hands. These changes can make some people anxious.

Almost everyone who is going through or has been through cancer can benefit from getting some type of support. You need people you can turn to for strength and comfort. Support can come in many forms: family, friends, cancer support groups, religious or spiritual groups, online support communities, or one-on-one counselors. What’s best for you depends on your situation and personality. Some people feel safe in peer-support groups or education groups. Some would rather talk in an informal setting, such as church. Others may feel more at ease talking one-on-one with a trusted friend or
counselor. Whatever your source of strength or comfort, make sure you have a place to go with your concerns.

The cancer journey can feel very lonely. It’s not necessary or good for you to try to deal with everything on your own. And your friends and family may feel shut out if you don’t include them. Let them in, and let in anyone else who you feel may help. If you aren’t sure who can help, call your American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 and we can put you in touch with a group or resource that may work for you. See Distress in People with Cancer or the Emotional Side Effects section for more information.

- References
See all references for Gallbladder Cancer

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If Treatment for Gallbladder Cancer Stops Working

If cancer keeps growing or comes back after one kind of treatment, it may be possible to try another treatment plan that might still cure the cancer, or at least keep it under control enough to help you live longer and feel better. Clinical trials also might offer chances to try newer treatments that could be helpful. But when a person has tried many different treatments and the cancer is still growing, even newer treatments might no longer be helpful. If this happens, it’s important to weigh the possible limited benefits of a new treatment against the possible downsides, including treatment side effects. 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 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. Your doctor can estimate how likely it is the cancer will respond to treatment you’re considering. For instance, the doctor may say that more treatment might have about a 1 in 100 chance of working. Some people are still tempted to try this. But it’s important to have realistic expectations if you do choose this plan.

Palliative care

No matter what you decide to do, it’s important that you 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 or supportive 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 goal 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 pain caused by cancer that has spread. Or a stent might be placed in a bile duct to keep it from being blocked by the cancer. But this is not the same as treatment to try to cure the cancer. Some of the treatments that might be used are discussed in “Palliative therapy for gallbladder cancer.”

Hospice care

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 the 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. See Hospice Care for more information.

Staying hopeful is important, too. Your hope for a cure may not be as bright, but there’s 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.

To learn more
You can learn more about the changes that occur when treatment stops working, and about planning ahead for yourself and your family, in *Advance Directives* and *Nearing the End of Life*.

- References
  See all references for Gallbladder Cancer

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