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After Salivary Gland Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- [Living as a Salivary Gland 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.

- [Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Salivary Gland Cancer?](#)

Living as a Salivary Gland Cancer Survivor

For some people with salivary gland 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 yet 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 get

regular treatment with chemotherapy or targeted therapy or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that does not 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

Even if you have completed treatment, you will likely have follow-up visits with your doctor for many years. It's very important to go to all 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. It's very important to report any new symptoms to the doctor right away.

Most doctors recommend follow-up exams every few months for the first couple of years, and then less often after that if nothing abnormal is found.

Imaging tests such as CT scans may be done after treatment to get a baseline idea of what the head and neck area look like. More imaging tests may be done if you later develop any signs or symptoms that might be due to a return of the cancer.

If you had [radiation therapy](#)¹ to the neck, your doctor will probably want to get blood tests as well to check your thyroid function.

You may be advised to see your dentist after treatment to check on the health of your teeth. Your doctor will also want to keep a close eye on your hearing, speech, and swallowing, which can be affected by treatment. If you are having problems with any of these, your doctor may refer you to a therapist for help with rehabilitation.

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. 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 Records²](#).

Your appearance and other changes

Surgery or other treatments can affect nerves and other structures in the face and neck. This can affect how you look. Ask your doctor about reconstructive surgery options that might be available for you.

Surgery around the jaw or neck can sometimes lead to ear numbness, weakness in raising your arm above your head, and weakness of the lower lip. If this happens, your doctor can refer you to a physical therapist, who can teach you exercises to improve your neck and shoulder strength and movement.

Treatment of salivary gland cancer can sometimes cause problems such as trouble speaking or swallowing, dry mouth, or even tooth loss. This can make it hard to eat, which can lead to weight loss and weakness due to poor nutrition.

Some people may need to change [what they eat during and after treatment³](#) or may need nutritional supplements to help make sure they get the nutrients they need. A team of doctors and nutritionists can work with you to help you manage your individual nutritional needs and maintain a healthy weight.

If treatment affects how you speak, there might be both surgical and non-surgical options that can help. Your doctor will probably refer you to a speech therapist, a professional who is trained in helping people with speech problems. Some people might need to learn new ways of speaking. The speech therapist can play a major role in helping with this.

Dental care is often very important at this time as well, especially if you your mouth is dry as a result of surgery. If needed, your doctor can refer you to a dentist, who can help you care for your teeth and offer ways to help with dry mouth, such as using artificial saliva.

Tell your doctor or nurse about any other problems you're having. There are also groups that can provide support and help teach you how to manage any lingering problems you may have.

Can I lower my risk of the salivary gland cancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) salivary gland 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](#)⁴, [eating well](#)⁵, [getting regular physical activity](#)⁶, and [staying at a healthy weight](#)⁷ 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 salivary gland cancer or other cancers.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)⁸ (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of 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 Recurrent Salivary Gland Cancer](#)⁹.

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹⁰.

Could I get a second cancer after treatment?

People who've had salivary gland cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, salivary gland cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Salivary Gland 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](#)¹¹.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/salivary-gland-cancer/treating/radiation-therapy.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition.html
4. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html
6. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html
7. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html
8. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/salivary-gland-cancer/treating/recurrence.html
10. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html

11. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html

References

National Comprehensive Cancer Network. Head and Neck Cancers. NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology. Version 2.2017--May 8, 2017.

See all references for Salivary Gland Cancer (www.cancer.org/cancer/salivary-gland-cancer/references.html)

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Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Salivary Gland 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](#)¹. 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 salivary gland cancers can get any second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- Another salivary gland cancer (this is different from the first cancer coming back)
- [Cancer of the oral cavity \(mouth\)](#)²
- [Lung cancer](#)³
- [Thyroid cancer](#)⁴

Follow-up after treatment

After completing treatment for salivary gland cancer, you should still see your doctor regularly. Your doctor may order tests to look for signs that the cancer has come back or spread. These tests are also useful in finding some second cancers, particularly a new salivary gland cancer or lung cancer. Experts don't recommend any other tests to look for second cancers in patients who don't have 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 salivary gland cancers should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)⁵ and [stay away from tobacco products](#)⁶. Smoking increases the risk of getting certain second cancers as well as other health problems.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)⁷
- Keep [physically active](#)⁸ and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)⁹ that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods
- Not drink [alcohol](#)¹⁰. 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 other health problems.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)¹¹ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroid-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines.html

6. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html
9. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
11. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

References

See all references for Salivary Gland Cancer (www.cancer.org/cancer/salivary-gland-cancer/references.html)

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