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After Vaginal Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

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

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it's very common to have questions about cancer coming back or treatment no longer working.

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

Living as a Vaginal Cancer Survivor

For many women with vaginal 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, yet it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other women, the cancer might never go away completely. Some women may get regular treatment with chemotherapy or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that doesn't 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

When treatment ends, 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 questions about any problems you are having and may do pelvic exams and Pap tests, as well as [colposcopy](#)¹ and [lab tests](#)² to look for signs of cancer or treatment [side effects](#)³. 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. This is the time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes or problems you notice and any questions or concerns you have.

Treatment can leave vaginal tissue fragile and prone to injury. Follow-up will require checking these tissues for injury or tightening and scarring. Some women will be advised to use vaginal dilators, which a woman inserts in her vagina to gently stretch her vaginal tissue, gradually making it more elastic and normal over time. You can learn more in [Treating Sexual Problems for Women With Cancer](#)⁴.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Your [survivorship care plan](#)⁵ 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 Records](#)⁶.

Can I lower my risk of the vaginalcancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) vaginal 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](#)⁷, [eating well](#)⁸, [getting regular physical activity](#)⁹, and [staying at a healthy weight](#)¹⁰ 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 vaginalcancer or other cancers.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)¹¹ (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of vaginalcancer 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 or 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 on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Options for Vaginal Cancer by Stage and Type](#)¹².

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹³.

Could I get a second cancer after treatment?

People who've had vaginal cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, vaginal cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Vaginal 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](#)¹⁴.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/how-diagnosed.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/understanding-your-lab-test-results.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
4. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fertility-and-sexual-side-effects/sexuality-for-women-with-cancer/problems.html
5. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
6. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
7. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
8. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html
9. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html
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11. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer/treating/by-stage.html
13. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-

[treatment/understanding-recurrence.html](#)

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

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American Society of Clinical Oncology. Vaginal Cancer: Follow-Up Care. 08/2017. Accessed at www.cancer.net/cancer-types/vaginal-cancer/follow-care on March 13, 2018.

Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020.

Society of Gynecologic Oncology. What happen after treatment? Accessed at www.sgo.org/patients-caregivers-survivors/patients/vaginal-cancer-what-happens-after-treatment/ on March 13, 2018.

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Can I Get Another Cancer After Having Vaginal 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's called a [recurrence](#)¹. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a [second cancer](#)². No matter what type of cancer you have had, it's still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Being treated for cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. And 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 vaginal cancer can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- [Vulvar cancer](#)³
- [Esophagus cancer](#)⁴
- Cancer of the ureter (the tube that connects the kidney to the bladder)

They may have an increased risk of [lung cancer](#)⁵. The risk of [bladder cancer](#)⁶ is also increased in women who were treated with radiation.

These cancers are all linked to [smoking](#)⁷, which is also a risk factor for vaginal cancer. And both vaginal and vulvar cancer are linked to infection with [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#)⁸.

Follow-up after treatment

After completing treatment for vaginal cancer women will see their doctors regularly to look for signs of their cancer coming back, as well as signs of a new cancer of the vagina. Experts do not recommend extra testing to look for second cancers in women without 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 vaginal cancer should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)⁹ and [stay away from tobacco products](#)¹⁰. Smoking increases the risk of many cancers, including the second cancers most often seen in women treated for vaginal cancer.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)¹¹
- Keep [physically active](#)¹² and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)¹³ 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](#)¹⁴. 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](#)¹⁵ for more on the causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence/what-is-cancer-recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults/intro.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/vulvar-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/esophagus-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/bladder-cancer.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv.html
9. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines.html
10. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
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15. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

References

See all references for Vaginal Cancer (www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer/references.html)

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