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After Vulvar Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- [Living As a Vulvar 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.

- [Second Cancers After Vulvar Cancer](#)

Living As a Vulvar Cancer Survivor

For many women with [vulvar cancer](#)¹, 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 others, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check or ease problems it's causing. Learning to live with [cancer that does not go away](#)² can be difficult and very stressful.

Life after vulvar 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 may have and may do exams and lab tests or x-rays and scans to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects. Almost any cancer treatment can have [side effects](#)³. 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.

[Lymphedema](#)⁴ is a common side effect when lymph nodes are removed as part of surgery for vulvar cancer. Your doctor will talk to you about lymphedema and what you can do to [try to keep it from starting](#)⁵. Be sure to tell your doctor about any swelling, heaviness, pain, or skin changes you notice in your genitals or your legs.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)⁶ 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 Records](#)⁷.

Can I lower my risk of vulvarcancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) vulvar 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](#)⁸, [eating well](#)⁹, [getting regular physical activity](#)¹⁰, and [staying at a healthy weight](#)¹¹ 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 vulvarcancer or other cancers.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)¹² (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of vulvarcancer 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 overall health. For general information on recurrence, you may want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹³.

Could I get a second cancer after treatment?

Women who've had vulvar cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, vulvar cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Vulvar Cancer](#).

Getting emotional support

Some feelings of depression, anxiety, or worry are 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/vulvar-cancer/about/what-is-vulvar-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/when-cancer-doesnt-go-away.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/lymphedema.html
5. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/lymphedema/for-people-at-risk-of-lymphedema.html
6. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
7. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
8. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
9. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html
10. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html
11. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html
12. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.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

References

See all references for Vulvar Cancer (www.cancer.org/cancer/vulvar-cancer/references.html)

Huang J, Yu N, Wang X, Long X. Incidence of lower limb lymphedema after vulvar cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2017;96(46):e8722.

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Second Cancers After Vulvar 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 a [second cancer](#)². No matter what type of cancer you've had, it's still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

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 vulvar cancer can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- A second vulvar cancer (this is different from the first cancer coming back)
- [Anal cancer](#)³
- [Vaginal cancer](#)⁴
- [Mouth and throat cancer](#)⁵
- [Cancer of the voice box \(larynx\)](#)⁶
- [Lung cancer](#)⁷
- [Cancer of the brain and central nervous system](#)⁸

Many of these cancers are linked to smoking and/or infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), which are also [risk factors for vulvar cancer](#)⁹.

Follow-up after treatment

After completing treatment for vulvar cancer, women will see their doctors regularly to look for signs of the cancer coming back, as well as a second vulvar cancer, or new cancers of the vagina and anus. Experts do not recommend additional testing to look for second cancers in women without symptoms. But be sure to 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 vulvar cancer should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)¹⁰ and [stay away from tobacco products](#)¹¹. Smoking increases the risk of many of the second cancers seen in women treated for vulvar cancer.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)¹²
- Keep [physically active](#)¹³ and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)¹⁴ 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](#)¹⁵. 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](#)¹⁶ 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/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/vaginal-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html
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8. www.cancer.org/cancer/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-adults.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/vulvar-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html
10. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines.html

11. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html
13. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html
14. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html
15. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
16. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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