



# After a Bladder Cancer Diagnosis



The bladder is an organ in the lower pelvic area (belly). The bladder stores urine, which is made by the kidneys. Urine is emptied from the bladder when you urinate (pee). If you have been told you have bladder cancer, you've probably already had exams, scans and x-rays, urine tests, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has grown into (invaded) the bladder wall. These tests help your doctor know what type of bladder cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

## Treatment for bladder cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of your bladder cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery is used to treat most bladder cancers. Small bladder cancers that haven't spread can often be removed. For larger bladder cancers, surgery might involve removing the tumor or the whole bladder. Removing the bladder is called a cystectomy. After surgery, some people need a catheter to drain urine. Sometimes an opening in the skin is made to drain urine. This is called a urostomy.

Other treatment can include radiation and medicines such as chemo, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. Many times, more than one type of treatment is needed.

## Be sure to ask:

- What is the goal of treatment?
- What type of bladder cancer do I have?
- Has the cancer invaded the muscle layer of the bladder?
- What stage is my bladder cancer, and what does that mean?
- Will I need more tests?
- Can the cancer be removed completely?
- Does my bladder need to be removed? If so, how will I pee after surgery?
- If I need a catheter or other device to pee after surgery, how long will I have it?

## What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need radiation therapy, you will work with a radiation oncologist to know what to expect before, during, and after radiation treatment. If you need other types of treatment, your doctor or cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for bladder cancer will have the same side effects. For example, a person might have part or all of their bladder removed. The side effects of this surgery are different from side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

## Be sure to ask:

- Do I need treatment other than surgery? What do you think is best for me and why?
- Are there any clinical trials for my type of cancer?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Will treatment affect my sex life? How and for how long? What can I do to help this?

## What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. Surgery and other treatments may change how your bladder and other organs function. You might have sexual problems or changes in how you pee. Be sure to ask your doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had bladder cancer are at high risk of having it again. Even if you feel fine, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for tests to check if the bladder cancer has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

### Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/bladdercancer](https://cancer.org/bladdercancer) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

## Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking may help reduce your chances of bladder cancer. If you work around chemicals, check with your doctor about which you should try to avoid. Eating well, drinking enough fluids, being active, getting to and staying at a healthy weight, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and lower your risk of getting a new bladder cancer or other cancers.

## Dealing with your feelings

Having bladder cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.