



Moving on After Treatment

The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You'll be relieved to finish treatment, yet it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common among people who have had cancer.

For years after treatment ends, you'll need to see your doctor for follow-up. These visits may include physical exams and blood tests, which can help to tell if the cancer has come back. Other tests, like chest x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs, may also be needed.

Your doctor will talk to you about side effects at these visits, too. Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some last for a few weeks to months, but others can last longer. Be sure to tell your doctor about any problems you're having so you can get the help you need.

Seeing a new doctor

At some point after cancer, you may need to see a new doctor. You will want to give your new doctor all the details of your cancer and treatment. Make sure you have this information handy, and keep copies of all your medical records for yourself:

- A copy of your "path report" from any biopsy or surgery
- If you had surgery, a copy of your operative (surgical) report
- If you were in the hospital, a copy of the discharge summary that doctors prepare when patients are sent home
- If you had radiation, a copy of your treatment summary
- If you had chemo, a list of your drugs, drug doses, and when you took them
- Copies of your x-rays and other imaging studies (these can often be put on a DVD)

Gathering these details during or soon after treatment may be easier than trying to get them at some point in the future.

Lifestyle changes during and after treatment

Having cancer and dealing with treatment can take a lot of your time. But now you may have time to look at your life in new ways. Maybe you are thinking about how to improve your health. Some people even work on this during cancer treatment.

Make healthy choices.

Think about your life before cancer. Were there things you did that might have made you less healthy? Maybe you drank too much, ate more than you needed, smoked, or didn't exercise very often. Maybe you kept your feelings bottled up, or let stressful things go on too long. Now is not the time to feel guilty or to blame yourself. You can start making changes today that can have good effects for the rest of your life. You'll feel better and be healthier, too.

Start by working on those things that bother you most. Get help with the changes that are harder for you. For instance, if you're thinking about quitting tobacco and need help, call us at 1-800-227-2345.

Eating healthy

Eating right can be hard to do during and after cancer treatment. Treatment may change your sense of taste. You may have a sick stomach. You may not feel like eating. You may even lose weight when you don't want to. On the other hand, some people gain weight even without eating more. This can be upsetting, too.

If you have lost weight or have taste problems, eat as well as you can and know that these problems will get better. You might want to ask your doctor or nurse to see a dietitian who can help you deal with some of these side effects. You may also find it helps to eat small meals every 2 to 3 hours until you feel better.

One of the best things you can do after treatment is put healthy eating habits into place. Try to eat at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day. Choose whole-grain foods instead of refined white flour and sugars. Try to limit meats that are high in fat. Cut back on processed meats like hot dogs, deli meats, and bacon. If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to 1 drink a day for women or 2 drinks a day for men – at the most. And don't forget exercise. A good diet and regular exercise will help you stay at a healthy weight and give you more energy.

Rest, fatigue, and exercise

Fatigue is feeling very tired. It's very common in people with cancer. This "bone-weary" feeling doesn't get better with rest. For some, fatigue lasts a long time after treatment.

It can be hard to be active when you feel tired all the time. But being active can help reduce your fatigue. Studies have shown that patients who follow an exercise program feel better and cope better, too.

If you were sick or on bed rest during treatment, it's normal to have lost some of your physical fitness, endurance, and muscle strength. Exercise can help make your muscles stronger, and can help fight fatigue. It can also help the depressed feeling that sometimes comes with being so tired.

Your exercise program should fit your needs. An older person who has never been very active may not be able to do the same amount of exercise as a 40-year-old. If you haven't been active in a few years but can still get around, you may want to try starting with short walks.

Talk with your doctor or nurse before starting. Let them know about your plans. And try to find an exercise buddy so you're not doing it alone. Having family or friends join you in a new exercise program can give you that extra boost of support to keep going. If you're very tired, though, you'll need to be sure you get some rest. Sometimes it's hard for people to allow themselves to rest when they're used to working all day or taking care of a home and family. But it's OK to rest when you need to.

What about your emotional health?

Once your treatment ends, you may find yourself filled with emotions. This happens to a lot of people. You may have been going through so much since diagnosis that you could only focus on getting through your treatment. Now you may find that you think about your own death or the effect cancer has had on your family. You may also think more about your relationship with your spouse or partner.

This is a time when you need people you can turn to for strength and comfort. This support can come from family, friends, cancer support groups, church groups, online support groups, or counselors.

Almost everyone who has been through cancer feels better if they get some type of support. Some people feel safe in groups, and others would rather talk in an informal setting, such as church. Others may feel more at ease talking with a close friend or counselor. Whatever your source of strength or comfort, make sure you have a place to go with your worries and concerns.

The cancer journey can feel very lonely. You don't need to go it alone. Your friends and family may feel shut out if you decide not to include them. Let them in – and let in others who you feel may help. If you aren't sure who can help, call us at **1-800-227-2345** anytime, day or night.

You can't change the fact that you have had cancer. What you *can* change is how you live the rest of your life.

Last Medical Review: 7/18/2014

Last Revised: 7/18/2014

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For additional assistance please contact your American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345 or www.cancer.org