

If Cancer Comes Back

Sometimes, cancer can come back after treatment. If it does, it's called cancer recurrence. It means that cancer cells are found after you were cancer-free for a length of time.

Sometimes, a person develops a new cancer that is not related to the first cancer. This is called a **second primary cancer**. This is not the same as recurrence. A second primary cancer is a totally new cancer.

Recurrent cancer

A recurrent cancer might come back in the same place it first started, or it might come back somewhere else in the body. If cancer spreads to a new part of the body, it's still named after the part of the body where it started. If cancer is found after you have been treated for one type of cancer, tests will be done to see if the cancer is the same type you had before or a new type.

What are the types of recurrence?

There are different types of cancer recurrence:

Local recurrence means that the cancer has come back in the same place it first started.

Regional recurrence means that the cancer has come back in the lymph nodes near the place it first started.

Distant recurrence means the cancer has come back in another part of the body, some distance from where it started (often the lungs, liver, bone, or brain).

If you have a cancer recurrence, your health care team can tell you the best information about what type of recurrence you have and what it means for you. They can also talk to you about your options for treatment and outlook (prognosis).

What you might feel

If cancer comes back, you may have lots of different feelings. You may feel sad and scared. You might feel more cautious, guarded, and less hopeful than before. It's important to talk about your feelings so your cancer care team and others can help.

Making decisions

If cancer comes back, you may have different treatments than what you had before. It's important to remember everyone is different. Talk with your doctor and cancer care team about your treatment options and trust them to help you make the best decisions.

Talk with your loved ones about your options and the decisions you have made or are thinking of making.

You may want to get a second opinion. You can see if other cancer centers can offer you something different. You might want to look into a clinical trial. Or you might decide not to get any more treatment. Whatever you do, know what your options are and choose the one that is best for you.

Treatment decisions are based on:

- Type of cancer
- Where it recurs
- How much it has spread
- Your overall health
- Your personal values and wishes

If you decide to keep getting treatment, talk to your doctor about how likely it is that the treatments will help. Will they make you feel better? Will they help you live longer? In many cases, your doctor can help you decide what therapy is best for you. Remember to check your insurance coverage when considering different options.



Whether or not you want cancer treatment, you can always get palliative care. This type of care focuses on managing symptoms in people with a serious illness like cancer. It can be given at any point during your care and through your entire cancer experience.

Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. You might find that you are able to cope better with their support and understanding.

To learn more about cancer recurrence, visit the American Cancer Society website at **cancer.org** or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.