



Cancer survivorship information for survivors and carers



How your general practice can support you to live well

This fact sheet is for people who have finished cancer treatment or are having maintenance therapies (who we will refer to as ‘cancer survivors’ in this fact sheet). It explains the importance of involving your general practice team in your healthcare. Your general practice team includes your local doctor (GP) and the general practice nurse (GPN). It also explains things you can do to improve your health as a cancer survivor.

“My GP said it is time to look after other aspects of my health”

– cancer survivor

Survivorship and your GP

Cancer survivors can face many challenges as a result of their cancer diagnosis and treatment, both physical and emotional. Some cancer survivors don't involve their GP with their cancer and non-cancer care as much as they could. The GP is the ideal practitioner to review all your health care needs.

- There are a lot of things you can do to improve your health as a cancer survivor. A key thing you can do is have a regular GP.
- Your GP can help with all your different health needs including your cancer-related health needs both during and after cancer treatment.
- If you do not have a GP, find one you can develop a trusting relationship with, who can meet your needs.
- Let your specialist know who your GP is. That way, communication can flow between your specialist, the hospital where you are treated, and your GP.

Key messages

- Your GP is the cornerstone of your healthcare.
- Make a long appointment with your GP to develop an after treatment health plan.
- Your GP and GPN are well placed to help you manage the effects of cancer treatment.
- Your GP and GPN can support you to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Lifestyle changes may help reduce the risk of cancer coming back, and help you to live better for longer.



Photo courtesy of Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)



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- You can keep your GP updated by sharing information about your hospital care during cancer treatment.

Your GP and GPN and your survivorship management plan

You experience a range of effects from cancer and its treatment, including emotional, physical, psychosocial and financial effects.

“Some people benefit from having a formal management plan that provides an organised approach and outlines all aspects of after cancer-treatment care.”

– GP

- Your GP may suggest developing a management plan. This plan lays out the actions you can take to help in managing your health.
- General practice nurses work in GP clinics and are part of your health team. They play a valuable role in health assessment; assisting to develop management plans and coordinating your care. They provide ongoing support and follow-up.
- Management plans can result in access to allied health care services in the community that you may require, for example; physiotherapy or a dietician.
- Ask your GP about developing a plan. A referral to other health professionals using this plan may make you eligible for Medicare rebates.

During and after cancer treatment can be a time of extreme emotions. There may be times when it is helpful to have professional supports.

- Speak with your GP about your emotional concerns.
- Ask your GP about a GP Mental Health Treatment plan. With this type of plan you can access support from counselling, psychology or group mental health services that are Medicare subsidised.

“GPs have a role after treatment (and during treatment). There is an opportunity to look more broadly at lifestyle. Lifestyle factors are core aspects of health.”

– GP

How your GP and GPN can help

After treatment you may be at increased risk of cancer coming back (recurrence); developing another cancer; long-term disability; fatigue; chronic medical conditions such as osteoporosis, heart disease and type 2 diabetes; weight gain; and death from non-cancer causes.

Your GP and GPN are well placed to:

- Help you manage the effects of cancer and its treatment, and suggest ways to reduce your risk of further illness.
- Advise about screening for cancer and non-cancerous conditions, managing health risks, and immunisation.
- Help you manage any long term medical conditions which may not be specifically related to the fact you have had cancer.





How your general practice can support you to live well



Your GP and GPN are available to support you making healthy lifestyle choices and changes

The following general healthy living recommendations are for all people who have had a diagnosis of cancer. They may also reduce many of the physical and emotional effects of cancer treatment. Speak with your GP and GPN about making healthy changes. They can support you in your efforts.

“After treatment is over people ask about things they can do to improve their recovery and improve their chances of long term survival.”

– GP

Maintain a healthy body weight

Obesity can worsen the side effects of cancer treatment and cause illness. There may be a higher risk of developing another cancer. Intentional weight loss (for those who are overweight or obese) can reduce these risks and improve your health.

Exercise regularly

Physical activity and resistance exercise are important for healthy living and have been shown to have important benefits for cancer survivors. Exercise can reduce anxiety and fatigue (see our fact sheet www.petermac.org/sites/default/files/ACSC_FactSheet_Fatigue%20WEB.pdf).

If you have not exercised before, it is advised to slowly increase exercise time and intensity. Speak with your GP about starting an exercise program.

Have a healthy diet and limit alcohol

Choosing a diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables and other unprocessed, low-fat foods helps cancer survivors to regain strength after treatment. A healthy diet reduces the risks of illnesses such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

Alcohol puts people at risk for several cancers, including cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, oesophagus, liver, breast, and rectum and colon. Alcohol increases the risk of recurrence of some cancers.

In people who have already been diagnosed with cancer, alcohol intake could affect the risk for developing these new cancers. Talk to your GP about reducing alcohol consumption if you drink more than a moderate amount each week.

Quitting smoking and avoiding second hand smoke

It is never too late to stop smoking. Quitting smoking is one of the best decisions you can make. It reduces the chances of some cancers returning or developing another cancer. Your GP and General Practice Nurse can support you with a plan for quitting smoking and can recommend tobacco substitutes such as patches. Your GP can prescribe other medications to help you quit as appropriate.

Healthy lifestyle recommendations

- Maintain a healthy body weight (body mass index between 18.5 and 25)
- Exercise regularly (at least 30 minutes of moderate activity daily)
- Eat more vegetables and fruit (two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables a day)
- Limit alcohol (no more than two standard drinks a day)
- Quit smoking and avoid second hand smoke.

– Cancer Council Australia



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Acknowledgment

Thank you to the health professionals and survivors who reviewed this resource.

Further information

ACSC has produced a video for survivors, family and friends about the role of your GP:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=sED-ZIVNDIw

Other resources to support cancer survivors include:

- Emotional impact of cancer and its treatment
- Coping with the fear of cancer coming back (fear of cancer recurrence)
www.petermac.org/services/support-services/australian-cancer-survivorshipcentre/cancer-survivors

Cancer Council Victoria (13 11 20) provides programs and resources:

- Free coaching program to help you make healthy lifestyle changes
www.cancervic.org.au/how-we-canhelp/healthy-living-after-cancer
- Nutrition
www.cancervic.org.au/living-with-cancer/diet-nutrition
- Exercise
www.cancervic.org.au/living-with-cancer/exercise
- Quitting smoking: Call the Quitline (13 7848)
www.cancervic.org.au/preventing-cancer/quit-smoking

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Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre

A Richard Pratt Legacy



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