



Cancer survivorship information for survivors and carers



Emotional impact of cancer and its treatment

You are likely to feel as though your life has been turned upside down. Despite this you may think you should be able to just pick up where you left off before your cancer diagnosis. But for many people who finish their cancer treatment, it isn't that simple.

Knowing what to expect after your treatment can help you and your family deal with the future and any changes that you may have to make.

'Every cancer sufferer needs to go through an extraordinary process of readjustment after the treatment.' (Neil)



Many survivors say they need to:

- go through a range of emotions: good and bad.
- take time to understand, accept or adjust to any loss and change in their life.

Be patient with yourself during this time. Don't expect to feel great about everything or anything! Go slowly. Give yourself the space to come to terms with all you have been through and what lies ahead.

Common feelings

Will the cancer come back?

Most survivors say they worry a lot about the cancer coming back. You may not have thought about this during your treatment but now treatment is over the possibility can be scary. The ACSC has information about fear of the cancer returning.

Feeling lonely

You may also feel quite lost and lonely after treatment finishes. This may not begin for a couple of months after you finish treatment or it may start straight away and go on for several weeks, months or sometimes longer. Trying to return to a 'normal' life or creating a 'new normal' life for yourself can be a big challenge.

Changes to your body

Your cancer may have changed the way your body looks or functions (e.g.

having a stoma, having a breast or limb removed, or changes in sexual function, weight or eating abilities). These changes can make you feel self-conscious about going out, meeting new people or being intimate with your partner.

Grief about other changes

Your work and financial state may have changed since your diagnosis. This can affect your self-esteem. You may find yourself grieving the losses and changes your cancer has brought into your life.

Feelings of sadness and anger commonly affect cancer survivors. This is very natural and the feelings usually go in time. However, for some people the feelings linger and may turn into depression.

Depression is different from sadness. It is a much more intense feeling than sadness. It can be serious and may need medical treatment. It is important you see your GP if you think you may be suffering from depression.

Friends and family

The people around you are also likely to go through strong emotions.

What has happened to you may make them question things about their own life and future. Your relationships may be stronger and more loving because of it.

But you may also find that some of their reactions may frustrate you. You



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Tips to help you cope

The following tips won't work miracles but they can help you find the best way to cope with your feelings after your treatment is over.

- Have contact names and numbers on hand of who to call if you have any questions about your treatment side effects.
- Try to take each day as it comes and expect a few bad ones!
- Do things at your own pace.
- Do things you know usually relax you. If these don't work as well as they used to, try something new, for example: gardening, meeting friends, yoga, reading, having a massage, listening to music, meditation, a new sport, craft work, etc.
- If you feel self-conscious about the changes your cancer has made to your body you may be able to camouflage them by using makeup, prostheses or clothing
- Talk to your partner about any sexual concerns you have. It may be hard at first but remember they are probably concerned too. Most loving partners will want to be close to you, understand how you feel and do things in your time.
- If you are not in a relationship you may still want to talk about your sexual concerns. Find someone you trust to discuss your feelings (a friend, your doctor or a counsellor).
- If you are worried about going out for the first time, go with someone you trust.
- Be prepared for mixed reactions from those you meet. Most people won't intend to upset you but some will. As hard as it may be, try to accept this.
- If you are going back to work, ask your boss if you can do a few hours a week to begin with and build up slowly.
- Don't be afraid to get extra help with housework, childcare, school runs and shopping. Most family and friends will want to help out.



- It can help a lot to talk to people close to you about your feelings and worries. Or you may prefer to talk to doctor or a counsellor.
- It may help to speak with another cancer survivor. Ask your doctor, nurse or social worker or contact a local support group about putting you in touch with someone. Or call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 and ask about Cancer Connect.

Remember: you don't have to sort everything out at once! It is important to be patient and kind with yourself. Everyone is different and what works for one person may not work for another. If you are unsure about how to best deal with your emotions, ask yourself

- What helps me keep anxious, angry or sad feelings away?
- What helps me relax?
- What helps me feel at peace?
- What helps me feel happy?

Try to be honest and think of yourself first. Work out what helps you best manage your emotions.

What may have helped you feel better before your cancer diagnosis may not be the same after. Other people's suggestions may not work for you either but try to keep an open mind. You may find trying something you wouldn't normally do does actually help you feel better.

may have to cope with people close to you not understanding how you feel.

You may also have to consider your children's needs. Children's reactions to a parent's illness can vary depending on their age. But generally they should be made to feel part of what is happening, to feel safe.

Learning to deal with your feelings

Many cancer survivors find it hard getting back to normal day-to-day life following their treatment. In fact, many say you never get back to the 'normal' way you lived before your cancer diagnosis. But you can find ways to make the 'new normal life' full and easier to cope with.

Try not to feel alone if you are struggling with things. Knowing what feelings are normal, how to manage them and when you may need help is an important part of being a cancer survivor.

Further information

-  Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636) has information about depression.
-  Cancer Council (13 11 20) booklets include: 'Talking to kids about cancer', 'Sexuality, intimacy and cancer', 'Caring for someone with cancer', 'Living well after cancer'.
-  Call the ACSC to find out about our wellness forums.
-  Carers Australia (1800 242 636) provides a carer advisory and counselling service.

All of these services may be accessed through their websites.

Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre
A Richard Pratt Legacy



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