



Cancer survivorship information for survivors and carers



Managing long-term and late effects of cancer treatment

Long-term and late effects will vary depending on the type and stage of your cancer as well as the type of treatment you had. But all the common cancer treatments (chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery and hormone therapy) can cause both long-term and late effects.

Not everyone who has cancer treatment will have long-term or late effects.

Even people who had the same type of

treatment won't always suffer the same side effects. For example, not all chemotherapy drugs cause the same ongoing or late effects.

Children who have had cancer may be at risk of developing late effects as they grow older. See 'Further information' to find out more about support for people in this situation.

Possible long-term side effects

Long-term side effects are those that happen during or soon after treatment finishes. In time many long-term side effects will become less severe or disappear

completely. They may include:

- feeling very tired (fatigued)
- pain
- loss of self-esteem and confidence
- changes in the way you look (e.g. scars, an 'ostomy' bag, loss of hair or a body part)
- problems with anxiety, depression and mood swings
- changes in the way your bladder and bowel work (e.g. incontinence, constipation, diarrhoea)
- menopausal symptoms (e.g. hot flushes, night sweats, weight gain, mood swings)
- problems with eating, drinking and weight
- mouth and teeth problems
- thinning of the bones (osteoporosis)
- fertility problems
- swelling in the limbs (lymphoedema)
- changes in sex life
- neuropathy (nerve damage which is sometimes caused by chemotherapy, which can lead to pain, tingling and numbness, usually in the hands and feet)
- 'chemo-brain' or 'chemo fog' (changes in memory and concentration sometimes affecting people who have been treated with chemotherapy)
- heart, liver and lung problems.





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Late effects

These can happen years after treatment finishes. They can include:

- lung, heart and liver problems
- developing another type of cancer
- cataracts (clouding of the lens in the eye, which can cause difficulty with vision)
- infertility
- bowel problems
- thyroid problems (the thyroid is a gland in the neck that makes some types of hormones)
- tooth decay
- changes in bone density (osteoporosis)
- lymphoedema
- memory problems.

Getting help and support

Any change in how your body looks, feels or functions can be very hard to deal with. Certain side effects may be annoying but manageable (e.g. numbness in the hands and feet). However, others can be more severe and have a big effect on your quality of life (e.g. infertility, changes to your sexual life or developing another type of cancer).

There are things that can be done to help control or treat many long-term and late effects from cancer treatment. It is important you find the right support

to help you manage and cope with any side effects you have or may develop.

The following tips may help.

- After finishing treatment, it is helpful to have a survivorship care plan: a written record with details of the cancer diagnosis, treatments and an ongoing plan of care. This will provide other health professionals you may need to see with a good knowledge of your cancer.
- Keep your follow-up appointments. Tell your doctor about any symptoms you have. It is always best to have them checked rather than worry. If you no longer have follow-up appointments, be sure to report any symptoms to your GP or get a referral back to your cancer specialist.
- Ask your doctor for help with any ongoing side effects. Don't let them go on for too long before asking for help. You may need a referral to other health professionals such as a dietitian, specialist nurse or counsellor.
- Talk to your doctor about whether or not you are at risk of developing late effects from your treatment. In some cases they may be able to alert you to the signs and symptoms of late effects. But this won't be the case with everyone.
- Be healthy. While we are still uncertain whether or not we can prevent late effects from cancer treatment, it may still help to stay as healthy as you can.

Further information

-  Cancer Council (13 11 20) booklets include 'Living well after cancer'.
-  Through the Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20) you can speak with a cancer nurse: ask about Family Cancer Connect and support groups and other support services that may help you. Cancer Connect is a free phone peer support service that puts people in touch with others who've had a similar cancer experience.
-  Call the ACSC to find out about our wellness forums.

If you had cancer as a child and need further information about possible late effects from your treatment:

-  CanTeen (1800 226 833) provides support for young people aged 12 to 24 who are living with cancer.
-  The Children's Cancer Centre (03 9345 4855) is at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.
-  The Peter Mac Late Effects Clinic (03 9656 1111) has a team of health professionals who provide personalised care and information.
-  Redkite (1300 722 644) provides support to children and young people and their families through the difficult cancer experience.

All of these services may be accessed through their websites.

Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre
A Richard Pratt Legacy



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