



Living well after cancer

Many people with cancer are successfully treated or cured. It's common for people to live a long time after treatment. People who have finished treatment may be called 'cancer survivors'.

When treatment finishes

During cancer treatment, you might have felt that your life was on hold. Now that treatment has ended, you might expect life to return to normal. However, it can be hard to get back to your daily activities. You might feel and look different.

With time, survivors often find a new way of living. Many people call this a 'new normal'.

Your feelings

It's common for people to have mixed feelings when treatment ends. Common feelings include:

- relief that treatment has finished
- loneliness or isolation
- a sense of loss and grief for how life used to be
- guilt that you don't feel happy
- anxiety about returning to normal life
- tired or run down
- happy or motivated to try new things or make lifestyle changes
- scared about the cancer coming back.

How you feel will depend on the type of cancer and treatment you had and what other support you have. Any side-effects from your treatment will also play a big part.

It may be helpful to allow yourself time to adjust to these changes, and to explain to your friends and family that you need their support. Knowing that these feelings are natural, and how to manage them, is an important part of being a cancer survivor.

Tips for adjusting to life after cancer

- Focus on each day, and expect good and bad days.
- Do things at your own pace. Avoid pressure to make decisions or start new activities right away. Plan time to rest between activities.
- If you feel apprehensive about going out for the first time, ask someone you love and trust to come along.

- Share your feelings and worries with family and friends, or talk to your doctor.
- Practise relaxation, meditation, yoga or deep breathing. Some people like to relax by doing activities such as gardening, reading, cooking or listening to music.
- Keep a journal to write down your feelings.
- Read other survivors' stories or connect with other people who have been through a similar experience.

Some people find that the weeks, months and years after treatment finishes is a time to look back on their lives. They may reassess what is important and fulfilling, or make changes to their lifestyle.

Fear of the cancer coming back

Feeling anxious and frightened about the cancer coming back (recurrence) is the most common fear for cancer survivors, especially in the first year after treatment. For some people, this fear may affect their ability to enjoy life and make plans for the future.

It may help to talk to your doctor about your risk of recurrence. This depends on many factors, including the type of cancer, stage at diagnosis, treatment and time since treatment. Generally, the more time that goes by, the less likely it is that the cancer will come back. If you feel worried or experience a new or different symptom, contact your doctor right away.

Follow-up care

After treatment has finished, you may need regular check-ups. These will allow your doctor to monitor your health and wellbeing. Ask your doctor about recommended interval of follow-up appointments.

Where can I get reliable information?

- **Cancer Council NSW 13 11 20.** Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. www.cancercouncil.com.au
- **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 13 14 50**