

POST-TREATMENT CANCER SURVIVORSHIP: EMOTIONAL CONCERNS

With the end of cancer treatment often comes a sense of relief, accomplishment and even joy in having gotten through a difficult experience. Yet for many post-treatment survivors, it is also a stressful time filled with new routines to learn, as well as mixed feelings about what they've just gone through. Many people also find themselves unsure of how to move forward, wondering, "Now what?"

COMMON EMOTIONS FACED AFTER TREATMENT

As a patient, you may have been so busy learning about your diagnosis, working with your medical team and going through treatment that you didn't fully feel the emotional impact of your diagnosis until after you finished treatment. The fact is, the side effects of cancer and its treatment are more than physical. They are also emotional. It's common for the end of treatment to bring a variety of complex and often conflicting feelings about their diagnosis, treatment and recovery.

For example, it is normal to feel relieved that treatment is over, yet angry or sad about having gone through such a serious illness. You may feel guilty for completing treatment when others weren't able to do so. You may also feel anxious and fearful about the cancer coming back. It is normal, too, to feel confused about what you've been through and to be concerned about the future.

Family and friends can provide much comfort and support during this time. However, post-treatment survivors can feel a bit isolated from loved ones and the world around them. Loved ones might not be fully aware of all the emotional challenges that can arise for you after treatment is over.

Sometimes, these emotions can be overwhelming, interfering with your day-to-day activities and even your health.

It is important to be able to talk openly with your health care team about any emotional symptoms you are experiencing as a result of your cancer. Members of your team can provide tips for coping or refer you to other sources of support such as a counselor or support group in your area. For example, CancerCare oncology social workers can provide emotional support and guidance after treatment is complete.

THE 'NEW NORMAL'

Another concern faced by many who have completed active treatment is the realization that life after their diagnosis and treatment never really goes back to what it was before cancer. Many find they are not able to return to their old "normal" life but must adapt to a "new normal." Understanding what your new normal is can take time. This process may involve:

- Reflecting on what you've been through
- Identifying changes you might want to make in your life
- Recognizing what you've learned and what's changed about yourself
- Re-evaluating personal relationships or professional goals
- Discovering new ways of finding meaning and fulfillment



As part of this process, you may find it helpful to seek out the support of others who understand what you're going through. Joining a support group for post-treatment survivors, such as those offered by CancerCare, can allow you to share with and learn from others who are facing similar issues, such as fear of recurrence, living with uncertainty, lingering side effects and going back to work.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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SPIRITUALITY AND CANCER

Spirituality means different things to different people. For some, spirituality is linked to a religious faith. Many report that their faith is part of what got them through the cancer experience and that afterward it continues to give them strength in the face of difficult circumstances.

For other people, spirituality is about the personal beliefs that bring comfort, meaning and purpose to their lives.

However you define spirituality, recent studies show that it can play an important role in coping with the recovery and healing process from cancer treatment. Spirituality can be experienced and expressed in many ways: in a traditional house of worship, out in nature or through involvement in the arts or community events, for example. There are many activities that can help you nurture your spiritual side, such as prayer, meditation and reflection and visualization.

It is not uncommon for people diagnosed with cancer to question why the illness happened to them and to search for meaning in the experience. Reading spiritual texts, writing in a journal or even blogging about your experiences can be ways to explore your questions and beliefs about meaning and faith. If you do not feel the need to seek answers or find special meaning in your experience, that is okay, too.

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