

Life After Cancer: Making a Survivorship Care Plan



Life after cancer can be full of questions. It can feel overwhelming. Your healthcare team can help you through it. Working with your providers to build a survivorship care plan can give you confidence and peace of mind.

A survivorship care plan is your personal map to life as a survivor. Your plan should include a guide to the care you'll need to stay well. You'll also want a detailed record of your cancer history. Share your plan with your current and future healthcare providers. Also make sure you keep a copy for yourself.

What are the benefits of a survivorship care plan?

A survivorship care plan can help you:

- Organize your health records and schedules in a single document that is easy to update and share
- Move your routine healthcare back to your main providers so you can get physicals, screenings, and other preventive care
- Know when and with which providers to schedule follow-up visits
- Find support in managing the physical and emotional side effects that are common after cancer care
- Know which symptoms could be a sign of a recurring or second (new) cancer so you can catch it early and improve your outcomes
- Build a healthy lifestyle that works for you and will help you handle or even prevent future health problems
- Reduce the chance that you'll ever need emergency care or a hospital stay

What's in a survivorship care plan?

The more detailed your care plan, the better. Along with a record of your past treatment, your plan should list the kinds of care that will keep you healthy and feeling good as you move forward. It should also include who will be giving that care and how they can work together to help you. If this plan feels like a lot, remember that you are not alone in making it. More information on that—and resources to help you make the plan—are at the end of this sheet.

Here are some things a survivorship care plan might cover:

- The facts of your diagnosis, such as the type of cancer, the date it was found, and its stage
- Key tests that were done and their results
- A list of all types of treatment you got for your cancer, such as surgery or radiation therapy
- Key details about each treatment, such as dates, medicine names and doses, your response, and contact information for the place of treatment
- Any side effects, reactions, or problems you had with each treatment
- Types of medicine you take or have taken in the past. This includes vitamins, herbs, and supplements, along with the doses, frequency, and purpose for taking each one.
- Your allergies and sensitivities
- A list of all your cancer care providers, their specialties, and their contact information

- The members of your extended care team, such as a nutritionist, physical therapist, or counselor
- Genetic testing done and the results, as well as any known family risk factors for cancer
- Any clinical trials you were part of, including the number and title
- Your family's health history

Your plan will also outline the things you need to know moving forward, such as:

- Any ongoing care you may need, such as tests, follow-up visits, or medicines
- Referrals to and coordination with any specialists you'll need to see, such as cardiologists (for your heart) or endocrinologists (for hormone problems like diabetes or thyroid disorders)
- Long-term and late-treatment effects you could have and where to go for care if you do
- Tips on dealing with any lasting side effects, like fatigue, cognitive changes (chemo brain), or problems during sex and with fertility
- Any recurring cancer or second cancer symptoms you should regularly check for, as well as when to get screenings
- A list of symptoms to tell your healthcare providers about if you have them
- Referrals for emotional support, such as counseling or support groups

Your plan may also offer tips to help you stay healthy and feel your best, such as:

- Eating healthy meals and snacks
- Getting more physical activity in ways that you enjoy
- Getting to or staying at a weight that supports your health goals
- Making a plan to quit any form of tobacco use and replace it with healthier habits
- Drinking alcohol in moderation or replacing it with nonalcoholic options if needed
- Using sunscreen

Finally, your care plan may include guidance and resources for:

- Health insurance problems
- Job concerns sometimes linked with health and cancer
- Financial aid
- Life insurance issues
- Other helpful resources

Getting started on your care plan

Many healthcare groups and providers agree that a survivorship care plan is a vital tool in your ongoing recovery and wellness. A plan may simplify your life. But it can be complicated to make. Know you have resources to help.

Ask your healthcare providers if they can help you put together a care plan suited to your goals and needs. Not all cancer care teams have the resources to walk you through making a whole plan. If that's the case, they should still provide you with the records and ongoing treatment information you need to get started. And don't be afraid to ask for recommendations for other support.

For more help, visit the American Society of Clinical Oncology's webpage on [survivorship care plans](#).

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