

For Teens: Finding a Primary Care Provider After Cancer



You've been through a lot, but now your cancer is in remission. Congratulations on this big step. Spending more time at a healthcare provider's office is probably the last thing on your mind right now. But it's important to make sure you have a solid plan to take care of your health after cancer.

Having a great primary care provider will help keep you healthy and ready to embrace your future.

Tips for finding the right primary care provider

It may be time for you to switch from a doctor who cares for children (pediatrician) to a doctor for adults. This person is also known as a primary care provider (PCP). A PCP can diagnose and treat general medical conditions. The timing of when you switch from a pediatrician to a PCP depends on your age, preferences, and health. A parent or guardian can help you with this process. You may still need to see a doctor that specializes in cancer (oncologist) in addition to your new PCP. Here are a few things to consider when finding a new PCP:

- **Check for oncology expertise.** You might want a provider who has experience with people who have had cancer. They will have a better understanding of your needs and possible long-term effects of your treatment.
- **Ask for recommendations.** Speak with your oncologist and cancer care team for their recommendations. They could point you toward a provider who understands your history and will work well with your oncologist.
- **Do your own research.** Your insurance company may have a list of providers to choose from. Once you have a few names, research each one online. Read reviews and check their credentials. Also, see if they have any special areas of interest or experience.
- **Set up meetings.** Don't be afraid to interview potential doctors. You can ask for a meet and greet appointment to discuss your situation and your needs. During this meeting, make sure you feel comfortable with the provider. Remember, this is someone you need to be able to trust and talk openly with about your health and well-being. You can have a parent or guardian join you.

Know your survivorship care plan

A survivorship care plan is like a road map to help you navigate your new life after treatment. It's also called a follow-up care plan. This plan comes from your cancer team. It shares all the details your new providers need to keep you feeling your best. The care plan tells your new providers all about what your cancer team did to help treat you.

Over time, you probably bonded with your cancer team. It can be scary saying goodbye and figuring out your care with someone new. But your survivorship care plan is there to help you make the transition. Some items included in it are:

- Recommended screenings to watch for returning or new cancers
- Possible late effects from your cancer and treatment
- When and what tests to get
- How to keep up a healthy lifestyle with the right foods and regular exercise

It's important to have your survivorship care plan plus all your medical records from your cancer treatment. You can ask for these from your oncologist's office or hospital medical records department.

Your survivorship care plan is unique to you and the type of cancer and treatment you had. You can learn more at the [American Society of Clinical Oncology](https://www.asco.org). They have templates for survivorship care plans.

Keep asking questions

During treatment, you likely had many questions. That won't stop just because your treatment ends. In fact, you may have more questions now.

Don't be shy about asking your provider about what's on your mind. This will help you make sure you get the attention you need. Common questions to ask include:

- How likely is it that my cancer will return?
- What do I need to do to stay healthy?
- Who can I talk to about my anxiety about cancer returning?
- Is this symptom caused by treatment or a sign of returning cancer?
- How many tests do I need, and how often, to make sure I am still healthy?
- Who should I see to make sure I stay healthy?
- Who do I call if I have questions or concerns?

Protect your mental health

Your physical health will be your healthcare team's main focus. But don't forget about your feelings. Part of your post-cancer healthcare routine may include seeing a counselor. They can help you adjust to life after cancer and talk through any fears or anxiety you have. Check with your treatment facility to see if they have any mental health resources for you.

You've had your own journey, but there are other teenagers with similar stories. Cancer support groups can help you connect with those who share your experience. Resources such as [Teen Cancer America](#) are a great place to start. By talking with others who understand what you've gone through, you'll feel less alone.

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