

For Teens: Life After Cancer



Hearing that you are cancer-free can bring a tidal wave of emotions. Relief, joy, and maybe a bit of disbelief. But after that initial rush, a lot of teens have the same question: "Now what?"

The truth is that life after cancer will be different, maybe even challenging in unexpected ways. However, it's also a life brimming with new possibilities, discoveries, and personal growth. Here are some tips to help you navigate this next chapter.

Embrace your feelings

From euphoria about being cancer-free to worry about the cancer returning—acknowledge what you're feeling. It's perfectly normal and valid to experience these highs and lows. They're all part of the healing process.

However, if your emotions start to feel like too much to manage, then it's time to reach out. Don't hesitate to tell your parents or talk with a mental health professional. They're there to help you work through these feelings. Also, consider joining a support group in person or online. It can be reassuring to share your experiences with other teens who really get it. Check out [Stupid Cancer](#) or [Teen Cancer America](#) for ways you can get connected.

Look after your health

Even though the cancer is gone, staying on top of your health still needs to be a priority. Be sure to:

- **Go to all check-ups.** Even if your schedule is jam-packed with school, activities, and friends, make time for each visit. As part of your survivorship care plan, these follow-up appointments are key to tracking your recovery and catching any signs of cancer coming back.
- **Eat well, stay active, and get enough sleep.** Now more than ever, your body needs proper fuel to regain strength. Follow your healthcare provider's advice about healthy eating. Find ways to add movement to your day, too. That doesn't mean you need to run for miles; light activities like walking or yoga will do the trick. Try to get at least 8 to 10 hours of good sleep to help your body and mind continue to recover after treatment.
- **Speak up about your concerns.** Some treatments have lingering side effects. You might notice changes in your energy levels, physical abilities, or even appearance. Listen to your body. If you're feeling off, don't keep it to yourself. Talk with your healthcare provider as soon as possible. It's not complaining—it's taking charge of your health.
- **Avoid alcohol, smoking, and vaping.** All of these can harm your health. If you need help quitting, talk to a trusted adult or your healthcare provider.

Get back to school, work, and friends

If you spent a chunk of time away from school, work, and friends because of cancer treatment, dipping your toes back into these worlds can feel like a big leap. You may have difficulty with concentrating, with memory or feeling tired. To ease back into your routine:

- **Communicate with your teachers.** Most schools can provide accommodations like extra time on tests, a reduced homework load, or even short breaks during class to help you transition smoothly.
- **Ask for help.** If you need any kind of support, just ask. Your education is vital, but your health always comes first. You've been through a lot, and it's OK to ask for help. Your school may have a guidance counselor or social worker who can help you. Talk with your employer if you need special accommodations at work.

- **Reconnect with your friends.** This part might feel a bit tricky. Your friends might not completely get what you've been through. That's normal. Share your experiences with them as much as you're comfortable. And if you don't want to talk about it, that's totally fine too.
- **Join social activities.** Catching up with friends, participating in group activities, going to events—these might seem like little things, but they can help you feel normal again and bring some comfort back into your life.

Plan for the future

For a while, thoughts about the future may have been too scary to even consider. Now, it's time to give yourself permission to dream again. What if some of your old goals look different now? That's OK! Whether you focus on attending college, exploring vocational training, taking a gap year, or something else entirely, you have the power to define your own path.

Know your strength

Being a cancer survivor gives you a unique life perspective. If you're up for it, use your voice to raise awareness, participate in fundraising events, or support other newly diagnosed teens. This isn't for everyone, but it can be a rewarding way to give back.

Above all, remember to be patient with yourself. Healing doesn't only mean getting better physically—it also includes emotional recovery. There might be challenges along the way, but you faced cancer and came out stronger on the other side. That's a feat to forever be proud of.

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