

For Teens: Coping with Cancer



Finding out you have cancer can be scary and overwhelming. Read on for some helpful tips and resources that can help you cope. And know that your family members, friends, and healthcare team are here for you every step of the way.

Knowledge is power

Learning about your cancer is important. Not only does it help you feel more in control, it can also help you be less anxious about your path forward.

Ask your healthcare provider for information about your cancer. You can also read about its treatment and recovery through trusted online sources, such as the [National Cancer Institute](#) and the [American Cancer Society](#). Understanding this information can be hard. If you need help, don't be afraid to ask your provider or a family member.

Knowing details about your cancer will help in your appointments. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and take notes. Get a full understanding of all the treatment options and their side effects. Ask questions about how certain treatments may affect your long-term health, such as how they might impact your ability to have children in the future. A parent or guardian can help you ask questions and make decisions, too. But remember that it's your body. So take as much control as you can in the process.

Learning about your healthcare team is also important. Depending on your cancer, you may be working with a pediatric oncologist (who works with children with cancer) or a medical oncologist (who works with adults with cancer). In addition, you may see a cancer surgeon and a radiation oncologist. You might also have nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, social workers, nutritionists, and child life specialists on your team. Get to know them. Understand each person's role in your treatment. Your whole team is here to help you.

Dealing with physical changes

Coping with the physical side effects of cancer and its treatment can be tough. You may have these common side effects and others:

- Hair loss
- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain
- Weight changes

Before you start treatment, ask your provider what short-term and long-term side effects you can expect. They may have tips to prevent some side effects. Talk with your healthcare team about how you're feeling during treatment. Know what side effects to report and how to get in touch with your healthcare team. They can give you tips on how to deal with side effects. Eat as well as you can during this time. If your provider says it's OK, adding some movement into your day can help manage some side effects. Remember: Take it easy and don't be too hard on yourself.

Finding emotional support

Having cancer is hard on your physical health. But it can be tough emotionally, too. You may feel worried, frustrated, sad, or angry. You may also have concerns about your changing body. Discuss your feelings with your care team. Don't hold back—they've likely heard others express similar emotions. And they can help you feel like you're not alone. They can also point you to organizations that serve the needs of teens who have cancer. Some examples include the [Ulman Foundation](#) and [Teen Cancer America](#).

Some other suggestions for taking care of your mental health include:

- Talking with a counselor
- Joining a support group in person or online to connect with other teens who are going through or have had cancer treatment
- Reading books about teens who have had cancer
- Doing things that bring you joy
- Spending time with friends and family
- Keeping a journal

Having cancer can feel isolating. So do whatever you can to feel less alone. Remember: Your family members, friends, and healthcare team are here to support your physical and mental health.

Managing your day-to-day life

Cancer can throw your life off track. Hospital and clinic visits and treatments can mean time away from school, friends, and activities. That can be frustrating. You may feel different from your friends and classmates because of what you're going through. Stay connected with your friends as much as you can. Let them know what you're going through and how they can help. And don't forget to have fun together! If you feel like you're struggling to keep up in school, let your parent or guardian and teachers know. Services like tutoring can help.

To learn more

- [Children's Oncology Group. Treatment Side Effects at childrensoncologygroup.org/treatmentsideeffects](https://childrensoncologygroup.org/treatmentsideeffects)
- [Ulman Foundation at ulmanfoundation.org/](https://ulmanfoundation.org/)
- [Teen Cancer America at teencanceramerica.org/](https://teencanceramerica.org/)

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