

Will my cancer come back?

A cancer recurrence means that the same cancer returns after a period of time. There is no way to tell if and when a cancer recurrence may occur. Cancer recurrence is one of the most common worries that many people face, especially in the first year after completing their cancer treatment. Many worry about losing control over their lives or facing death. While having some concerns is normal, too much fear and stress can have a negative impact on your life. Learning more about how to deal with this worry can help you to feel more confident and cope better as you return to your usual lifestyle after treatment.



Triggers of fear

Specific events can cause a temporary increase in your anxiety. This is perfectly normal. Knowing more about when these events may happen allows you to be more prepared to manage the worry. These may include:

- Follow-up appointments
- Cancer diagnosis in another person
- Anniversary of your diagnosis
- Symptoms similar to the ones you had when you found that you had cancer
- Unexplained body symptoms like fatigue, pain or weight loss

What you can do

It is helpful to have a plan after you identify the triggers. Besides incorporating stress-relieving methods that have worked for you previously to cope with the trigger event, below are some other tips that you may find useful:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn more about your cancer, including the common signs and symptoms, risk of recurrence and follow-up care plan• Recognize and share your emotions. Talk to your family or friends about it, or join a support group. Journaling may also help• Find ways to relax and spend time on hobbies and activities that you enjoy (e.g. listen to music, watch funny shows, use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, yoga or meditation)• Stay active wherever possible. Exercise regularly if you can, and take short walks outside. Sunlight, fresh air and the sounds of nature can help lift your mood• Adopt healthy living habits such as eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly and getting adequate sleep. This will help you feel better both physically and emotionally• Focus on things that you can control (e.g. be involved in your healthcare decisions, decide on what to do each day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid habits that increase cancer risks (e.g. tobacco smoking, alcohol)• Try not to hide or ignore negative thoughts and emotions. This will not make them go away, and might sometimes even make them worse. Accept that it is normal to have some fear, and work on ways to alleviate this fear• Try not to dwell on fearful or negative thoughts• Avoid being overwhelmed by too many daily tasks. Pace yourself and focus on what is most important

When to call your cancer care team

Please inform your healthcare team if you feel that the fear is affecting your daily life, or if you experience any of the following:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Having problems with eating or sleeping
- Losing interest in activities that you used to enjoy
- Having problems in concentration or making decisions
- Being unusually forgetful

The above may indicate that you have anxiety or depression, which will need further assessment and treatment by your cancer care team. You may contact your medical social worker for counselling, or call **+65 6436 8417** or **+65 6436 8088** to book an appointment with our medical social worker if you are a patient with NCCS.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, please call Cancer Helpline at **+65 6225 5655** or approach your doctor or nurse for further details.

Useful resources

- Oncolink : <https://www.oncolink.org/support/practical-and-emotional/coping-communication-concerns/coping-with-fear-of-recurrence>
- American Cancer Society : <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html>)
- National Cancer Institute : <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/survivorship/new-normal>)

The above contents are made available as part of TEMASEK FOUNDATION-ACCESS (Accessible Cancer Care to Enable Support for Survivors) PROGRAMME, a holistic care programme to support cancer patients during their care and recovery journey.

The contents have been approved by the Cancer Education Information Service, National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), for people with cancer and their families and caregivers. However, this information serves only as a guide and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis, treatment or advice. For specific medical conditions, please seek expert medical advice from your healthcare team.

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