

Caring for someone with cancer through recovery



After completing treatment and receiving news from the doctor that the cancer is in complete remission (meaning that all signs of cancer are gone), the journey to recovery begins. As the frequency of attending medical appointments lessens, acute side effects go away and the body slowly feels stronger, your loved one would most likely feel relieved, and perhaps hopeful that their lives can finally return to normal. For the person providing care and support, similar feelings of relief and rekindled hopes are most likely felt.

Very often however, changes and problems occur not only during cancer treatment, but recovery as well. Many people require ongoing support of their families and friends to adjust to their "new normal". Problems your loved one may face include:

Long term after effects of cancer treatment

Although most side effects go away some time after treatment completion, some may remain for a longer period of time or are unfortunately permanent. Some examples include fatigue, numbness over hands and/or feet, or memory problems. Your loved one may expect to resume roles and responsibilities they used to undertake, but may feel frustrated and inadequate when they come to experience their physical limitations brought about by these long term after-effects.

Fear of cancer coming back

One of the most common worries that many people face is whether their cancer will come back (cancer recurrence). They may feel unsettled and uncertain about their future, and this is especially true in the first year after completion of the cancer treatment. There may be anxiety prior to follow-up appointments, or when there are physical symptoms which your loved one may attribute to cancer recurrence.

Social and work life challenges

The cancer diagnosis and treatment could also have caused your loved one to experience significant changes in their relationships with people around them, be it their family, friends or co-workers. For instance, high stresses faced during cancer treatment could have resulted in communication difficulties and hence relationship strains. Apart from these, your loved one may also worry about whether they will be able to return to work, now that treatment has completed. After effects of cancer treatment such as poorer concentration can make it harder for them to resume work, and this can in turn lead to other concerns such as finances.

What you can do

Some tips which may help to support your loved one's road to recovery include:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your loved one to be patient in letting the body and mind recover, as dealing with cancer and its treatment would have had a big effect on his or her body• Read up more, or ask the healthcare team about handling long term after-effects, so that you can support him or her in managing them• Encourage and allow your loved one to express his or her feelings, and assure them that it is normal to feel fearful or worried. Offer a listening ear• Have open communication with your loved one regarding his or her needs and limitations, since some of the symptoms experienced may not be visibly seen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not expect your loved one to resume his or her roles and responsibilities fully immediately after treatment, even though they may look fine outwardly. Recovery takes time – be patient• Do not make light of your loved one's feelings or try to brush them off• Avoid smoking around your loved one, to protect your loved one from second-hand smoke

- Encourage your loved one to eat healthily (e.g. using ingredients such as healthier cooking oil) and exercise regularly, to regain strength after treatment. Eat and do physical activities together with him or her – this increases fun, motivation and enhances your relationship

When to call your cancer care team

While it is normal for a cancer survivor to feel anxious and worried occasionally, watch for possible signs of *post-traumatic stress disorder* – when these feelings of anxiety, dread and fear persist, worsen, or affect daily life. Some people may develop this after being diagnosed with cancer. Talk to your loved one's healthcare team if you feel that this is a concern.

If your loved one is a patient with NCCS, you may call **+65 6436 8417** or **+65 64368088** to book an appointment to speak to an NCCS medical social worker or clinical psychologist if necessary.

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.

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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