

# Patient Survivorship

## Living as a Cancer Survivor

Anyone who has faced or is facing cancer is a survivor. There are millions of survivors living in the U.S. and each one is unique – some may choose not to use the word survivor and some do.

We also recognize the importance of co-survivors as well. These are individuals who has cared for a friend or loved one with cancer. Some survivors have several co-survivors.

Both survivors and co-survivors understand that many things change after a cancer diagnosis and those changes can happen very long-term.

For survivors who wonder “what next?,” we have a program in place just to answer those questions. Our survivorship care visit is an important visit that a patient and their co-survivors can have.

These visits include:

- Summary of all treatments received such as chemotherapy and radiation
- Plan for clinical follow-up
- Surveillance plan for cancer recurrence
- Healthy lifestyle planning, including referrals for nutrition, exercise, and general well-being
- Empowerment to survivors and co-survivors to advocate for their best life after cancer

Even after treatment ends, your cancer journey continues. It may take you a while to readjust to life after treatment. You may wish to make changes in your nutrition and lifestyle or other habits to help prevent recurrence or enhance your overall health. Use these sections to help you navigate your “new normal” and to promote wellness during survivorship.

## Follow-Up Care

Follow-up care after completing cancer treatment is very important. Your healthcare team will help you manage long-term side effects and watch for any changes such as the cancer spreading or coming back. Here are some things to remember about follow-up care:

### **Always go to your follow-up appointments.**

- You will probably have follow-up exams every 3-6 months following treatment depending on the type of your cancer.
- After some time goes by without a recurrence, your healthcare team will probably recommend check-ups at less frequent intervals.

### **Follow your recommended screening schedule.**

- Your screening schedule will depend on the type and stage of your cancer and other aspects of your medical history.
- Typically a few months after treatment, your doctor may order an imaging scan such as a CT scan, PET scan, or MRI to set a new baseline. Your doctor will use this image to compare with future scans to check for recurrence.
- At most appointments with your oncologist, you will first have a lab visit to do blood tests. Your oncologist uses these blood tests to check for tumor markers, protein levels, blood cell counts, and general health.

\*Based off of your physician’s recommendation, not all may apply to each patient.

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**If you change your primary care physician, make sure your new doctor has all your medical records and history. You can do this by:**

- Contacting your oncologist's office to send the medical records to your new primary care physician.
- Obtaining your own copy of your records to take to your primary care physician.
- Keeping a copy of your medical records at home to make copies for any medical team.

**Tell your doctor about any side effects.**

- Some side effects are delayed and can present months after treatment ends.
- Let your healthcare team know of any and all changes so they can help you manage them effectively.

**Keep your health insurance, if at all possible.**

- Follow-up care, especially imaging, can be very expensive if you do not have health insurance.
- If you are at risk to lose coverage, contact your financial counselor.

## Healthy Behaviors for Prevention and Recovery

As you probably already know, a healthy lifestyle helps to prevent cancer and other diseases. There are two types of prevention:

**Primary prevention helps prevent disease from occurring in the first place.** Examples of primary prevention include immunizations, a healthy lifestyle, and avoiding carcinogens in daily life and in the workplace. Some examples of carcinogens are pollution, radon gas, infectious agents, and ultraviolet light.

**Prevention helps halt or slow disease in its earliest stage.** Examples of prevention of the initial diagnosis include screenings such as CT scans to check for lung tumors or mammograms to detect breast cancer. When diseases, like cancer, are caught early they are usually easier to treat.

Learn more about methods of primary and secondary prevention and the steps you can take to lead a healthy life in the following sections.

## askSARAH<sup>®</sup> About Cancer Screening

### Breast Cancer

 <b>AGE</b> <b>20+</b>	<b>MONTHLY:</b> Breast self-exams	 <b>AGE</b> <b>20-40</b>	<b>EVERY 3 YEARS:</b> Breast exam by your physician or practitioner	 <b>AGE</b> <b>40+</b>	<b>CONSULT MD ANNUALLY:</b> Mammogram and breast exam by your physician or practitioner
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Calculate your breast cancer risk by visiting: [Cancer.gov/bcrisktool](https://www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool)

*Women should talk with their physicians regularly starting as early as age 25 about their individualized risk for breast cancer, as higher risk women may benefit from genetic counseling or early screening.*

### Cervical Cancer

 <b>AGE</b> <b>21-29</b>	<b>EVERY 3 YEARS:</b> Pap test	 <b>AGE</b> <b>30-65</b>	<b>EVERY 5 YEARS:</b> Pap test and HPV test	 <b>AGE</b> <b>65+</b>	<b>STOP TESTING</b> Women with normal history should stop testing*
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\*Women with an abnormal diagnosis should be tested for 20 years following the result, even if testing continues past age 65. A woman whose uterus and cervix have been removed for non-cervical cancer reasons, and who has no history of cervical or pre-cervical cancer, should not be tested.

### Colorectal Cancer

 <b>AGE</b> <b>45+</b>	<b>SCREENING:</b> Flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years or a colonoscopy every 10 years  *Dependent on your risk, there are alternative tests. Consult with your physician for more information.
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Please consult your physician. He or she may recommend screening earlier based on your family or personal history with cancer.



Questions? Call  askSARAH 816.448.7737

## askSARAH<sup>®</sup> About Cancer Screening



Lung Cancer



AGE  
55-74

**SCREENING:**  
Low-dose CT scan

Current smokers or those who have quit within the past 15 years and who have at least a 30 pack-year smoking history



1 pack/day x 30 years = **30 pack-year history**

2 packs/day x 15 years = **30 pack-year history**



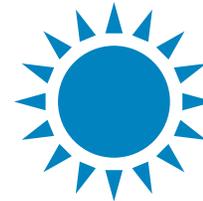
Skin Cancer



AGE  
20+

**SCREENING:**  
Regular full body skin self-exams and skin exams by your doctor

\*Those at high risk for skin cancer include those with reduced immunity, personal history of skin cancer and a strong family history of skin cancer.



Questions? Call  
 askSARAH<sup>®</sup>  
816.448.7737



Please consult your physician. He or she may recommend screening earlier based on your family or personal history with cancer.

[hcamidwest.com/cancer](http://hcamidwest.com/cancer)

## Survivorship Nutrition

Once cancer treatment is complete, it is time to restore and rejuvenate the body by feeding it with the best foods for optimal nutrition. Nutrition status, physical activity, and body weight all play a role in preventing cancer recurrence. Here are some guidelines to follow while adopting a new lifestyle now that cancer treatment is over.

### **Eat a wide variety of colors of fruits and vegetables every day.**

- Fruits and vegetables contain phytochemicals that fight cancer. Each color contains a different phytochemical. A wide variety of colors introduces more types of these cancer fighting chemicals into the body.
- Choose organic varieties when available to limit exposure to chemicals and pesticides. Wash all fruits and vegetables very well.
- Frozen fruits and vegetables are a great alternative to fresh and are easy to have available when time for shopping is limited.

### **Choose complex carbohydrates for increased energy.**

- Select complex carbohydrates like whole grains (oats, wheat, brown rice, whole grain pasta) and whole fruits and vegetables.
- Complex carbohydrates are digested slowly due to their high fiber content, providing sustained energy.
- Choose grain products that have whole wheat or a whole grain flour listed as one of the first three ingredients.
- Avoid highly-processed and refined grains (white enriched flour, baked goods, snack foods, sweets).
- One serving of whole grain is one slice of bread, ½ cup of cooked rice or pasta, and ½ cup of whole grain cold cereals and oatmeal.

### **Choose lean protein most of the time.**

- Choose lean proteins that include beans, eggs, white meat chicken and turkey, and fresh fish (not farm raised). When available, select organic and locally farmed. Other good sources of protein are nuts and tofu.
- Limit red meat to less than 18 ounces per week. Red meat includes beef, pork, and lamb. For reference, one ounce of meat contains 7 grams of protein. To make sure that you are getting enough protein, aim to eat a source of protein at every meal.

### **Incorporate good fats into meals and snacks.**

- Eliminate fried foods and eat foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids such as avocados, fish, and nuts.
- Avoid trans fats and avoid foods containing partially hydrogenated oils.

### **Limit sweets and simple sugars. Avoid artificial sweeteners.**

- Choose fruit to satisfy cravings for sweets. Sweets provide our body with empty calories and no nutritional value.
- Stevia is a plant-based natural sweetener that is an acceptable alternative to sugar or artificial sweeteners like aspartame, sucralose, and saccharin.

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## **Drink plenty of water.**

- Staying hydrated is essential to rejuvenating the body. Too much caffeine may lead to dehydration.
- Green tea and white tea are also good beverage options for staying hydrated.
- Aim for 80 ounces of caffeine-free fluids per day. If you are not drinking any water, start slowly and gradually increase water intake.

## **Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight for your height.**

- Consult with a registered dietitian to determine individual energy needs and a realistic goal weight.
- Measure portion sizes.
- Begin to track food intake in a journal.

## **Exercise**

- If not currently exercising, gradually work toward 45-60 minutes 5-6 days a week. This can be split up into 10-minute increments or longer to make it more possible when time is a factor
- Be realistic and start slowly. A regular exercise program may help to minimize stress and depression.
- Choose an enjoyable activity. Enlist a friend or relative as an accountability partner.

## **Nutrition Supplements**

- Choose food as the primary source for vitamins and minerals. Ask a registered dietitian for guidance on vitamins, minerals, and other nutrition supplements.
- Do not rely on supplements for cancer prevention.

## **Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.**

- Alcohol is a contributing factor to many types of cancer.
- Alcohol provides the body with calories but no nutrients.

## **Fear of Recurrence**

Many believe that once treatment ends, the cancer journey is over, but that's not the case. Many cancer survivors struggle with the fear of recurrence. What if my cancer comes back? What if my cancer spreads? For some, these fears can become overwhelming even years into remission. These fears are completely normal, but there are things you can do to try to manage them.

## **Take charge of what you can.**

- You may feel afraid because of the lack of control you have over the situation. To take back some control in your life, try making positive changes.
- Talk to a registered dietitian about developing a survivorship nutrition plan. Good nutrition can reduce your chance of recurrence and make you healthier all around.
- Start an exercise program. Exercising is not only good for your body; it is also good for your mind. Exercising releases endorphins, natural chemicals that make you feel happier. Many people also say exercising helps clear their minds and lower stress. Always talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- Stay on top of your screenings and check-ups. At the end of your treatment, work out a screening and check-up plan with your oncologist. What kind of scans or tests do you need? How often do you need them?

## Fear of Recurrence (continued)

### Take a deep breath.

- If you feel yourself starting to get worked up, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and count to ten. This may seem like silly or old advice, but taking a second to gather your thoughts can make you feel a lot better.
- Try meditation or visualization. Find a quiet, comfortable spot in your home. Take a few moments to yourself to breathe deeply and reflect on the positive things in your life. Think about some of your goals, even simple ones, and imagine yourself reaching them. In the rush of everyday activities, we sometimes forget to just breathe.

### Find a hobby.

Hobbies can be a great source of entertainment and can also take your mind off of negative things. Try one of the hobbies listed below or make up one of your own. Find something that you enjoy and are passionate about.

- Knitting
- Cooking
- Painting
- Learn a martial art
- Fishing
- Hiking
- Photography
- Writing
- Yoga

### Volunteer

Volunteering can be a worthwhile way to pass your free time and make a difference in your community. Is there a cause you are passionate about? To find a variety of volunteer opportunities in your neighborhood, visit [VolunteerMatch.org](http://VolunteerMatch.org) or [Volunteer.gov](http://Volunteer.gov).

A quick word of caution: For some, volunteering for a cancer support organization may hit too close to home. Consider how it may affect you to be in this environment with constant reminders of your experience. You need to do what is best for you. If you are unsure how it may affect you, volunteer once before committing more time.

### Talk about it.

You may find it helpful to talk to someone. It can be especially comforting to connect with other survivors. Hearing other survivors' stories can show you what you are feeling is normal, and you are not alone. You may also be able to help someone else by sharing your story. Here are some options for connecting with other survivors:

- Support Groups
  - Cancer Support Community hosts support groups around the country.
- Visit [cancersupportcommunity.org](http://cancersupportcommunity.org) or call (888) 793-9355.
  - Ask your healthcare team about other groups in your area or at your hospital.
- One-on-One Partnering Organizations: These organizations connect you with a fellow survivor. Usually the connections happen via phone.
  - Imerman Angels: Visit [imermanangels.org](http://imermanangels.org) or call (877) 274-5529.
  - Cancer Hope Network: Visit [cancersupportcommunity.org](http://cancersupportcommunity.org) or call (888) 793-9355.
  - Cancer Connection: Visit [thecancerconnection.org](http://thecancerconnection.org) or call (512) 459-5883.
- Survivor Retreats
  - Epic Experience offers outdoor adventure retreats to adults with a past cancer diagnosis. Activities are based on the season. Visit [epicexperience.org](http://epicexperience.org) or call (855) 650-9907.
  - First Descents hosts retreats for young adults (18-39) to learn to rock climb, kayak, or surf. Visit [firstdescents.org](http://firstdescents.org) or call (303) 945-2490.

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## **Educate yourself.**

Knowledge is power. Talk to your oncologist about your fear of recurrence. Here are some questions to ask:

- What are my chances of recurrence?
- What can I do to lower my risk?
- What signs do I need to look for to know if my cancer has returned?

Armed with the answers to these questions you can better understand your situation and minimize fear of the unknown. If you do face a recurrence, remember that every survivor's situation is different. With clinical trials and new medications, there may be many treatment options available. Not all recurrences are the same.

## **Know what triggers your emotions and avoid it.**

Do movies or TV shows that address cancer upset you? Don't watch them. Does the sight of the sweatshirt you wore on treatment days bother you? Throw it out or donate to a clothing bank. Do you get especially anxious around scan days? Ask a friend to go to lunch with you. If you can identify the objects or activities that trigger negative feelings, you can make a special effort to avoid them.

## **Don't dismiss your fear.**

It is normal and understandable to fear recurrence. A cancer diagnosis is a scary thing. If you've already been through treatment, you know how difficult it can be. Don't be too hard on yourself. It is okay to be scared. It is okay to be upset. Admitting your feelings can be an important first step to managing your emotions.

Remember what works for other people may not work for you. Try a few different things. Once you find an activity that makes you feel at ease, be sure to include it in your schedule. Take time for yourself.

If your fear of recurrence becomes overwhelming or interferes with your day-to-day activity, talk to your doctor. You may need individual counseling from a medical professional. Your doctor can make a recommendation for you.

When active treatment is complete, you will have a survivorship appointment with one of our Nurse Practitioners. They will review your treatment and individualized surveillance plan.

For more information visit [mypearpoint.org](http://mypearpoint.org).



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