Nasopharyngeal Cancer - After Treatment

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After Treatment

ON THIS PAGE: You will read about your medical care after cancer treatment has finished and why this follow-up care is important. To see other pages in this guide, use the colored boxes on the right side of your screen, or click ?Next? at the bottom.

After treatment for NPC ends, talk with your doctor about developing a follow-up care plan. This plan may include regular physical examinations and/or medical tests to monitor your recovery for the coming months and years. ASCO offers cancer treatment summary forms [2] to help keep track of the cancer treatment you received and develop a survivorship care plan once treatment is completed.

People treated for NPC should receive regular follow-up medical and dental examinations to check for signs that the NPC has come back (recurred) or a secondary cancer (a different type of cancer) has developed. During follow-up visits, doctors may check thyroid function, vision, and hearing to detect any cranial nerve damage from treatment. They may also take an MRI or CT scan six to eight weeks after treatment, called a baseline study. If NPC comes back, the baseline study will help them track when the changes began. Most recurrences of NPC happen within the first two to three years after treatment, so follow-up visits will be more frequent during those years.

People who have had NPC have a higher risk of developing a secondary cancer. Researchers are evaluating the benefits of using chemotherapy as a way to prevent a second cancer from developing (called chemoprevention [3]).

Follow-up visits will also help manage any late or long-term side effects from cancer treatment. For example, periodic ear examinations are necessary to remove buildup of dried earwax. Prevention of dental cavities [4] is also important. Fluoride application is recommended whenever the oral cavity and the salivary glands receive radiation treatment.

Rehabilitation [5] is a major part of follow-up care after head and neck cancer treatment. People may receive physical therapy and speech therapy to regain skills, such as speech and swallowing. Supportive care to manage symptoms and maintain nutrition during and after treatment may be recommended. Some people may need to learn new ways to eat or to eat foods prepared differently. People may look different, feel tired, and be unable to talk or eat the way they used to. Many people experience depression. The health care team can help people adjust and connect them with both physical and emotional support services.

People recovering from NPC are encouraged to follow established guidelines for good health, such as maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, eating a balanced diet, and having recommended cancer screening tests. Talk with your doctor to develop a plan that is best for your needs. Moderate physical activity can help rebuild your strength and energy level. Your doctor can help you create an appropriate exercise plan based upon your needs, physical abilities, and fitness level. Learn more about the next steps to take in survivorship [6], including making positive lifestyle changes [7].

To continue reading this guide, choose ?Next? (below, right) for a list of questions you may want to ask your doctor. Or, use the colored boxes located on the right side of your screen to visit any section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/25394
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24973
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24499
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