Coping With Changes to Your Body

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How your body changes

Cancer and cancer treatment may cause changes to the way you look, feel, and perform daily tasks. Some cancer treatments can cause temporary or permanent changes to your body, but not all treatments do. Some of the changes you may experience are listed below.

- Scars from surgery or loss of a body part
- Hair loss [2] from radiation therapy or chemotherapy
- Weight loss [3] or weight gain [4] from the cancer or treatment
- Fatigue [5]
- Changes in your physical abilities, such as strength and endurance changes

As a teen, your body is changing as a part of normal development, and trying to figure out which changes are normal and which are related to cancer and treatment can be confusing. The following list includes some of the effects that cancer treatment can have on normal changes during puberty:

- Cancer and cancer treatment can affect your growth and slow it down.
- It may delay the beginning of menstrual periods in young women.
- It may make acne harder to treat.

If you have questions or concerns about any of the changes in your body, be sure to talk with your doctor or a nurse.

Coping with looking and feeling different

Outward changes, such as skin problems or losing your hair, can make you feel self-conscious. Even changes that aren't as visible, such as feeling tired or a hidden scar, can make you feel differently about yourself. It may help to remember that most teens feel self-conscious at times and that's normal. These tips may help you cope with looking and feeling different:

- Give yourself time to get used to your new appearance and adjust to your body.
- Remember that many body changes, such as hair loss or weight gain, are only temporary. Some permanent changes, such as scars, will become less noticeable over time.
- Talk with other teens with cancer about how they cope with their body changes.
- Be prepared for questions and comments about your appearance. Decide how much you want to tell people and think about how you'll answer questions. If you prefer not to talk about it, just tell your friends that it's private.
- Remember that while your body may look and feel different, you're still the same person on the inside. The qualities that make you unique and special aren't changed by cancer.
- If you're feeling overwhelmed by the changes in your body, ask your doctor for a referral to a counselor or a social worker. Learn more about finding help and support [6].

More Information

Look Good...Feel Better [7]

Self-Image and Cancer [8]

Life After Treatment [9]

Cancer in Teens [10]

Additional Resources

Look Good?Feel Better for Teens/2bMe [11]

Teens Living with Cancer: Body Issues [12]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects/Hair+Loss+or+Alopecia
[3] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects/Weight+Loss
[4] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects/Weight+Gain
[5] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Cancer.Net+Feature+Articles/Side+Effects/Coping+With+Cancer-Related+Fatigue
[6] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Teens/Dealing+With+Cancer/Finding+Help+and+Support
[7] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Cancer.Net+Feature+Articles/Side+Effects/Look+Good%26hellip%3BFeel+Better
[8] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Emotional+and+Physical+Matters/Self-Image+and+Cancer
[9] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Teens/Life+After+Treatment
[10] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Teens
[11] http://lookgoodfeelbetter.org/programs/programs-for-teens
[12] http://www.teenslivingwithcancer.org/i-can-deal-with-it/body-issues/