Coping After Cancer

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [1], November / 2012

*Watch the "Moving Forward" video series for young adults [2] from ASCO and the LIVE**STRONG** Foundation, adapted from this content*

Key Messages:

- Finishing treatment is exciting, but it may also be challenging.?
- Resuming a normal schedule after treatment may be difficult, and you may need to redefine what you consider normal.?
- Give yourself time to adjust to physical and emotional changes during this transition.

During the past few months, or longer, your life has revolved around your cancer treatment and recovery. Now that treatment has ended, your routines, emotions, and priorities will likely change.

Routine changes

Although you will still visit the doctor periodically for follow-up care, medical care will consume much less time in your schedule now. This means that you may return to work [3] or return to school [4] if you were not attending during cancer treatment. In addition, you may have more free time to do activities that you enjoy or to hang out with friends. However, it is important to remember that you may not have the energy or ability to return to your normal routine immediately. Ease back into activities when you feel comfortable. And recognize that some things may never be the same. Although that may seem discouraging, you can view this as a new chapter of your life, full of possibilities.

Emotional changes

Meanwhile, along with changes to your routine, you may experience new emotions after finishing treatment. In addition to feeling happy, relieved, and excited, it is normal to experience some negative emotions during this transition period:

- Fear that the cancer may return [5]?
- Anxiety [6] about returning to work or school
- Insecurity about treatment-related changes to your body [7] (such as scars or hair that hasn't grown back yet)
- Frustration that your recovery is slower than you would like, or that you can't do some of the things you could do in the past
- Sadness about how your life may have been different if you had not been diagnosed with cancer
- Isolation because you don?t see your supportive health care team as frequently or because you have grown apart from friends who you did not see often during your treatment?
- Guilt [8] that you are recovering while some of your friends with cancer are still in treatment?
- Concern about medical bills and health insurance?
- Uncertainty about your future?

Priority changes

You may also find that the experience of living with cancer makes you look at your life in a new way. This perspective may cause you to reevaluate your priorities and goals [9] related to your education, career, and relationships.

Coping with change

Some young adults find that they need help coping with changes in their lives after cancer treatment ends. Here are some suggestions that have helped other young cancer survivors adjust:

- Keep talking about how you're feeling with a close friend, your parents or other family members, your nurse or doctor, or a counselor [10].?
- Write in a journal [11] to process your thoughts and emotions and to set goals.
- Keep in touch with people you met during your cancer treatment, and look forward to meeting new people in this new phase of life.?
- Attend a support group [12] in person or online [13]. You might even find one for young adult cancer survivors.

- Find a way to help other young adults with cancer. You've learned a lot from your experience that you can share.
- Do things you enjoy and consider exploring new activities and trying to master new skills.

More Information

Cancer in Young Adults [14]

ASCO Expert Corner: What Comes Next After Finishing Treatment [15]

Cancer Survivorship [16]

.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Multimedia/Cancer.Net+Videos/For+Young+Adults+with+Cancer
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/25216
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25215
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/25241
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/25481
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/25194
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/24491
[9] http://www.cancer.net/node/24649
[10] http://www.cancer.net/node/24699
[11] http://www.cancer.net/node/24528
[12] http://www.cancer.net/node/25383
[13] http://www.cancer.net/node/24634
[14] http://www.cancer.net/node/25117
[15] http://www.cancer.net/node/24398
[16] http://www.cancer.net/node/22