

Returning to School After Cancer [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 11/2012

Key Messages:

- Although going back to school may be exciting, it may also be physically and emotionally challenging. Take it easy the first few weeks.
- Consider meeting with student affairs and academic advisors to review your progress toward a degree and learn about resources to help during your transition.
- Keep your school health care team up to date with your medical history so they can assist with any follow-up care needs.

If you took time off from school during cancer treatment, consider these strategies to ease your transition back.

Communicate with the student affairs office and academic advisors

Before you return, meet with school advisors to discuss your transition. Most colleges and universities have an office of student affairs that oversees issues related to student life. Advisors in this office can help coordinate your return to school and explore available health, financial aid, and career planning resources. It is also important to meet with an academic advisor to discuss your course choices and progress toward your degree.

The following are some topics to consider discussing with student affairs and academic advisors:

- The possibility of taking a reduced course load
- Attendance issues, especially if you will have continuing doctors' appointments
- The availability of services and accommodations for students with disabilities, if applicable
- The availability of student health services and student health insurance

Communicate with the student health center

In addition, schedule a meeting with the medical staff in the student health center to discuss your cancer treatment, current health status, and expected needs for follow-up care. Most student health centers will want to do everything they can to help with your transition back to school. And they will appreciate being kept up to date on your medical condition.

Consider discussing the following topics with the student health center medical staff:

- Your medical history, including the specific diagnosis and treatment
- Your current health status and follow-up care needs, including current medications, upcoming appointments or tests, and your oncologist's contact information
- How to coordinate your care between the student health center staff and your oncologist
- How to inform your teachers about any special needs you may have in the classroom as a result of your medical condition

Learn more about [managing your health after cancer](#) [3] and [keeping a personal medical record](#) [4].

Address any learning and classroom difficulties

Some students may experience new academic challenges when returning to school. Although rare, some types of cancer and cancer treatment can cause learning problems, such as difficulties with concentration, memory, reading comprehension, or handwriting. Some of these problems may be temporary, but some may be long term. Learn about [ways to manage thinking and learning problems](#) [5].

Many people do not experience learning problems after cancer treatment, but if you have trouble, ask for help. Talk openly with your health care team about any challenges you are having and ask for advice on how to cope. Your doctor can also help you work with your school to obtain services or accommodations if you have a learning disability. Federal laws, including the [Americans With Disabilities Act](#) [6], allow students with disabilities to receive special accommodations, which may include extended time to complete tests, audio textbooks, free tutoring, or modified housing. To receive these accommodations, the student must first make a request, and all disabilities must be documented by a medical professional.

It's your decision whether you choose to talk with your instructors about your cancer experience. You may not be comfortable talking about the details and may not feel that it is relevant to your academic performance. However, if you decide to tell your instructors about your cancer experience, they may be able to help you informally by allowing you extra time to complete assignments or providing you copies of their lecture notes. If you are requesting formal accommodations or disability services, your instructors will be informed by the school of any relevant details about your disability.

Tips on making the adjustment

It is natural to want to jump right in and get back to your normal schedule, but going back to school can be physically and emotionally tiring. Take it easy for a while, and don't overdo things; your health is still the most important priority. Here are some recommendations for making a

smooth adjustment back to school:

- Get in touch with a few of your friends from school, and ask them to fill you in on any changes on campus.
- Think about visiting school before going back full time or part time. For example, attend a few social events, such as parties or sports games, or spend some time on campus just hanging out with your friends.
- Ask a friend to meet you on campus the first few days to give you emotional support.
- Be prepared for questions about your cancer experience and know what you are going to say.
- Be prepared for insensitive comments or questions, and try not to take them personally.
- Consider joining a [support group](#) [7] for young adults with cancer who may share similar experiences.

More Information

Moving Forward Videos: [School Concerns](#) [8] for Young Adults With Cancer

[Coping After Cancer](#) [9]

[Talking With Your Friends](#) [10]

[Resources for Young Adults](#) [11]

[Cancer in Young Adults](#) [12]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/young-adults/life-after-treatment/returning-school-after-cancer>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25214>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24569>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24722>

[6] <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/28091>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25213>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25206>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25218>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25117>