

[Home](#) > [Survivorship](#) > [Life After Cancer](#) > Coping With Fear of Recurrence

PDF generated on July 23, 2016 from <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/life-after-cancer/coping-fear-recurrence>

## [Coping With Fear of Recurrence](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 08/2015



[3] Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Coping With Fear of Recurrence](#) [3] adapted from this content.

After treatment ends, one of the most common concerns survivors have is that the cancer will come back. The fear of recurrence is very real and entirely normal. Although you cannot control whether the cancer returns, you can control how much the fear of recurrence affects your life.

### Tips for coping with the fear of recurrence

Living with uncertainty is never easy. It is important to remind yourself that fear and anxiety are normal parts of survivorship. Worrying about the cancer coming back is usually most intense the first year after treatment. This worry usually gets better over time.

Here are a few ideas to help you cope with the fear of recurrence:

- **Recognize your emotions.** Many people try to hide or ignore “negative” feelings like fear and anxiety. Ignoring them only allows them to strengthen and become more overwhelming. It often helps to talk about your fears with a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional. Or you can try writing down your thoughts. Talking and thinking about your concerns can help you explore the issues that underlie your fear. This might include the fear of having to repeat cancer treatment, losing control over your life, or facing death.

- **Accept your fears.** Telling yourself not to worry or criticizing yourself for being afraid won't make these feelings go away. Accept that you are going to experience some fear, and focus on ways to manage the [anxiety](#) [4]. Be aware that your anxiety may temporarily increase at specific times. These may include follow-up care appointments, the anniversary of your diagnosis, or someone else's cancer diagnosis.
- **Don't worry alone.** Many cancer survivors find [joining a support group](#) [5] to be helpful. Support groups offer the chance to share feelings and fears with others who understand. They also allow you to exchange practical information and helpful suggestions. The group experience often creates a sense of belonging that helps survivors feel less alone and more understood.
- **Reduce stress.** Finding ways to [manage your stress](#) [6] will help lower your overall level of anxiety. Try different ways of reducing stress to find out what works best for you. This could include:
  - Spending time with family and friends
  - Focusing on hobbies and other activities you enjoy
  - Taking a walk, meditating, or enjoying a bath
  - Exercising regularly
  - Reading a funny book or watching a funny movie
- **Be well informed.** In general, most cancers have a predictable pattern of recurrence. However, no one can tell you exactly what will happen in the future. A health care professional familiar with your medical history can give you information about the chance the cancer could recur. He or she can also tell you what symptoms to look for. Knowing what to expect may help you stop worrying that every ache or pain means the cancer has returned. If you do experience a symptom that doesn't go away or gets worse, talk with a health care professional.
- **Talk with your doctor about follow-up care.** One goal of follow-up care is to check for a recurrence of cancer. Your follow-up care plan may include regular physical examinations and/or medical tests to monitor your recovery. Keeping up with a regular schedule of

follow-up visits can provide survivors with a sense of control. Find more information on [developing a survivorship care plan](#) [7].

- **Make healthy choices.** Healthy habits like [eating nutritious meals](#) [8], [exercising regularly](#) [9], and getting enough sleep help people feel better both physically and emotionally. Avoiding unhealthy habits, like [smoking](#) [10] and [excessive drinking](#) [11], helps people feel like they have more control over their health. Read more about [healthy living after cancer](#) [12].

## When you need more help

Despite your best efforts to cope, you might find yourself overwhelmed by fear or anxiety. The following feelings may indicate more serious anxiety or depression:

- Worry or anxiety that gets in the way of your relationships and daily activities or prevents you from going to your follow-up care appointments
- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Having trouble sleeping or eating well
- Not participating in activities you used to enjoy
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling that you have nothing to look forward to
- Being unusually forgetful

If you are concerned about anything on this list, talk with your health care team. You may also want to consider asking for a referral for [counseling](#) [13].

## More Information

[Dealing With Cancer Recurrence](#) [14]

[Managing Emotions](#) [15]

[Telephone and E-Mail Helplines](#) [16]

[Life After Cancer](#) [17]

## **Additional Resources**

American Cancer Society: [Living With Uncertainty: The Fear of Cancer Recurrence](#) [18]

National Cancer Institute: [Facing Forward Series: Life After Cancer Treatment](#) [19]

---

### **Links**

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/life-after-cancer/coping-fear-recurrence>

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22941>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30336>

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

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24589>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25394>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24985>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24996>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25002>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24981>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24554>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>

[14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25042>

[15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25109>

[16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24698>

[17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25400>

[18]

<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorshipduringandaftertreatment/understandingrecurrence/livingwithuncertainty/living-with-uncertainty-toc>

[19] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/life-after-treatment>