

[Home](#) > [Survivorship](#) > [About Cancer Survivorship](#)

PDF generated on July 20, 2016 from <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/about-survivorship>

## [About Survivorship](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 07/2016



Watch the Cancer.Net video: [Cancer Survivorship: An Overview, with Robert Miller, MD](#) [3], adapted from this content.

### Who are Cancer Survivors?

The term “cancer survivor” commonly refers to someone who has a history of cancer. “Co-survivor” is a term sometimes used to describe a person who has cared for a friend or loved one with cancer.

The word “survivor” does not appeal to all people who have a history of cancer. The reasons for this vary. For instance, they may simply identify more with being “a person who has had cancer,” or perhaps they are dealing with cancer every day and do not think of themselves as a survivor, but more as someone who is “living with cancer.”

Living life with a history of cancer is unique for each person. Yet a common thread is true for most, that *life is different after cancer*.

Some common reactions to having had cancer are:

- I appreciate life more.
- I have greater self-acceptance.

- I feel more anxious about my health.
- I don't know how to cope now that treatment is over.

## What is Survivorship?

“Cancer survivorship” has at least 2 common meanings:

- Having no signs of cancer after finishing treatment.
- Living with, through, and beyond cancer. According to this definition, cancer survivorship begins at diagnosis and includes people who continue to have treatment over the long term, to either reduce the risk of recurrence or to manage chronic disease.

## What are the Phases of Survivorship?

These three phases of survivorship describe the specific period a survivor is going through:

- **Acute survivorship** begins at diagnosis and goes through to the end of initial cancer treatment. Cancer treatment is the focus.
- **Extended survivorship** begins at the end of initial cancer treatment and goes through the months after. The effects of cancer and treatment are the focus.
- **Permanent survivorship** is the period when years have passed since cancer treatment ended and recurrence seems less likely. Long term effects of cancer and treatment are the focus.

## Survival statistics

The number of people with a history of cancer in the United States has gone up greatly over the last 45 years. In 1971, there were 3 million people with cancer. Today there are more than 15.5 million.

- About 67% of today's cancer survivors were diagnosed 5 or more years ago.

- About 17% of all cancer survivors were diagnosed 20 or more years ago.
- Nearly half (47%) of survivors are 70 or older.

Most cancer survivors were diagnosed with common cancers:

- 23% - breast cancer
- 21% - prostate cancer
- 9% - colorectal cancer
- 8% - cervical, uterine, or ovarian cancers
- 8% - melanoma

The increased survival rates may be due to 4 major improvements:

- Screening tests that may find cancers earlier, such as:
  - [Mammography](#) [4] for breast cancer
  - [Prostate Specific Antigen \(PSA\)](#) [5] test for prostate cancer
  - [Colonoscopy](#) [6] for colorectal cancer
  - [Pap test](#) [7] for cervical cancer
- Better treatments
- Improved management of side effects, which helps to keep planned treatments on schedule

- New treatments such as [targeted therapy](#) [8] and [immunotherapy](#) [9]

Visit ASCO's [CancerProgress.Net](#) [10] website to learn more about the historical pace of cancer research.

## **Surviving cancer: What to expect**

At the end of active treatment, a patient's safety net of regular, frequent contact with the health care team ends. Survivors may experience:

- Relief that treatment is over
- Uncertainty about the future
- Loss of usual support
- Increased anxiety
- Fear of recurrence, that the cancer will come back after treatment
- Guilt about surviving, having lost friends and loved ones to cancer
- Physical, psychological, sexual or fertility problems
- Relationship struggles
- Discrimination at work
- A social network that now feels inadequate

## **Changed Relationships**

When active treatment is over, some survivors' needs change and [relationships may shift](#) [11]:

- Some friends may become closer, while others distance themselves

- Families can become overprotective or may have exhausted their ability to be supportive
- Ignored relationship problems prior to cancer diagnosis can surface

What you can do:

- Realize the entire family changes from the cancer experience in ways they may not be aware of
- Work through these changes to get the support you need
- Maintain open and ongoing communication

## **Getting back to work**

[Going back to a regular work schedule](#) [12] is a sign of getting back to a normal routine and lifestyle. Most people need their job and the health insurance it provides.

People with cancer may:

- Work during treatment
- Take time off for treatment and return to work afterwards
- [Be unable to return to work](#) [13] due to the effects of the cancer or its treatment

At work, you may find that:

- Coworkers may want to help but not know how
- [You are treated differently or unfairly](#) [14], when compared with before cancer treatment

What you can do:

- Realize that [when and how you choose to discuss a diagnosis is a personal decision](#) [15]
- Set the limits, if you do choose to start the conversation
- Try to anticipate questions from coworkers both during and after treatment and decide in advance how you want to answer

## More Information

[Survivorship](#) [16]

[Childhood Cancer Survivorship](#) [17]

[Cancer Terms to Know After Treatment](#) [18]

[Moving Forward Videos: Perspectives from Doctors and Survivors](#) [19]

## Additional Resources

[LIVESTRONG](#) [20]

[National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship](#) [21]

## Statistics Sources

*American Cancer Society's Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures 2016-2017*  
<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@research/documents/document/acspc-048074.pdf>  
[22]

*National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Survivorship*  
<http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/ocs/statistics/statistics.html> [23]

---

## Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/about-survivorship>

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27131>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24584>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27651>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24481>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24638>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24729>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24726>

[10] <http://www.cancerprogress.net/>

- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25112>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24549>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/35156>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25298>
- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/35016>
- [16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22>
- [17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25395>
- [18] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25380>
- [19] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/videos/young-adults-cancer>
- [20] <http://www.livestrong.org/>
- [21] <http://www.canceradvocacy.org/>
- [22] <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@research/documents/document/acspc-048074.pdf>
- [23] <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/ocs/statistics/statistics.html>