

Life after a Cancer Diagnosis in the United States



When an individual is diagnosed with cancer, his or her life is changed irrevocably. Cancer survivors often face serious and persistent adverse outcomes, including physical, emotional, psychosocial, and financial challenges as a result of the cancer diagnosis and treatment. Many challenges experienced by cancer survivors begin during cancer treatment and continue in the long term, but others can appear months or even years later. These long-term and late effects include, but are not limited to:

- bone density loss (osteoporosis);
- cognitive impairment (trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, and/or making decisions that affect everyday life);
- diagnosis with a new type of cancer(s);
- distress, anxiety, and/or depression, which can interfere with a person's ability to cope effectively with cancer and its treatment;
- endocrine dysfunction, which is dysfunction of the organs and glands that control body functions such as growth, sexual development, reproduction, sleep, hunger, and the way the body uses food;
- fatigue that is severe and often not relieved by rest;
- fear of cancer recurrence;
- hearing loss;
- heart damage (cardiotoxicity);
- infertility;
- insomnia;
- joint changes;
- lung (pulmonary) damage;
- lymphedema, which is swelling, most often in the arms or legs, that can cause pain and problems in functioning;
- metabolic syndrome, which occurs when an individual has three or more of the following health risk factors: excess body fat around the waist, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, impaired fasting glucose, and low HDL cholesterol;
- mouth changes, such as change in taste, mouth sores, dry mouth, jaw pain, and sensitive gums;
- nerve problems (peripheral neuropathy);
- nutrition issues;
- pain;
- premature aging;
- recurrence (return) of original cancer; and
- sexual dysfunction.

Although all cancer survivors face challenges, certain groups of people, including racial and ethnic minorities, shoulder a disproportionate burden of the adverse effects of cancer and cancer treatment. In addition, survivors of cancer diagnosed during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood (from ages 0 to 39), are particularly at risk for severe long-term and late effects. The Children's Oncology Group's "Long-Term Follow-Up Guidelines for Survivors of Childhood, Adolescent, and Young Adult Cancers" were developed to help standardize and enhance the lifelong follow-up care of individuals who were diagnosed with cancer as children, adolescents, or young adults. For more information, see <http://survivorshipguidelines.org/>.