

LIFE AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS IN THE UNITED STATES

When an individual becomes a cancer survivor, 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.

Among the challenges experienced from the time from diagnosis to the end of initial treatment are (207):



choosing a physician(s)
and treatment facility that
are the right fit;



choosing among a variety
of treatment options; and



managing adverse side effects
of cancer and cancer treatment,
many of which persist long term.

Many challenges experienced by cancer survivors begin during cancer treatment and continue long term, but others can appear months or even years later. These long-term and late effects include, but are not limited to (207):



bone density loss (osteoporosis);



cognitive impairment, sometimes
known as “chemo brain”;



diagnosis with a new
form of cancer(s);

DISTRESS

distress, which can interfere with a
person’s ability to cope effectively
with cancer and its treatment;

FATIGUE

fatigue that is severe and
often not relieved by rest;

FEAR

fear of cancer recurrence;



heart damage (cardiotoxicity);

INFERTILITY

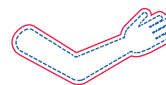
infertility (see sidebar on
Preserving Fertility, p. XX);



lung (pulmonary) damage;



endocrine dysfunction (changes
to the endocrine system, which is
the collection of glands and organs
that secrete hormones directly into
the blood and lymphatic network);



lymphedema: swelling, most often
in the arms or legs, that can cause
pain and problems in functioning;



pain;

AGING

premature aging;



recurrence of original cancer; and

SEXUAL
DYSFUNCTION
sexual dysfunction.

Although all cancer survivors face challenges, survivors of cancer diagnosed from ages 0 to 19, during childhood and adolescence, 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/>.

Adapted from (1)