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After Adrenal Cancer Treatment

Get information about life as a cancer survivor, next steps, and what you can do to help.

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

Living as an Adrenal Cancer Survivor

- [If the cancer comes back](#)
- [Could I get a second cancer after treatment?](#)

For some people with adrenal cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get chemotherapy or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Life after adrenal cancer means returning to some familiar things and making some new choices.

Follow-up care

Follow-up care will be very important after treatment for adrenal cancer. One reason for this is that the cancer can come back (recur), even after treatment for early-stage disease. Your doctor will want to see you frequently in the first months and years after treatment, but this might become less often as time goes on. This is a good time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes or problems you notice and any questions or concerns you have.

If you are still taking mitotane, your follow-up appointments may need to be more frequent to see if the mitotane levels in your blood are in a good range and if there are any side effects from this drug. Remember that mitotane will also suppress the usual adrenal steroid hormone production from your other, normal adrenal gland. As a result, you will need to take hormone replacement tablets to protect you against cortisol deficiency.

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as [early detection \(screening\) tests](#)² for other types of cancer, or tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what to watch for and when you should contact your doctor
- [Diet and physical activity](#)³ suggestions
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Nutrition

Eating right can be hard for anyone, and may have gotten tougher during cancer treatment. The cancer, varying hormone levels, and your treatment can all affect how you eat and absorb nutrition. Nausea can be a problem during and after some treatments, and you may have lost your appetite and some weight.

If you have lost or are losing weight, or if you are having trouble eating, do the best you can. Eat what appeals to you. Eat what you can, when you can. You might find it helps to eat small portions every 2 to 3 hours until you feel better. Now is not the time to restrict your diet. Try to keep in mind that these problems usually improve over time. Your cancer team may refer you to a dietitian, an expert in nutrition who can give you ideas on how to fight some of the side effects of your treatment.

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor

you can do that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as exercising, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements. Unfortunately, since there are no known preventable risk factors for this cancer, it is not yet clear if there are things you can do that will keep it from coming back.

Tobacco use has been suggested as a risk factor for adrenal cancer by some researchers, so not smoking might help reduce your risk. We don't know for certain if this will help, but we do know that it can help improve your appetite and overall health. It can also reduce the chance of developing other types of cancer. If you want to quit smoking and need help, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345. You can also learn more in our [Guide to Quitting Smoking](#)⁵.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)⁶ (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of cancer progressing or coming back. This doesn't mean that no supplements will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that might be harmful.

If the cancer comes back

If the cancer does recur at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is located, what treatments you've had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices by Type and Stage of Adrenal Cancer](#)⁷.



still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Unfortunately, being treated for cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can be linked to a higher risk of certain second cancers.

Survivors of adrenal cancer can still get any type of second cancer, but they have increased risks of:

- [Lung cancer](#)²
- [Bladder cancer](#)³
- [Prostate cancer](#)⁴

Women who have had adrenal cancer also have an increased risk of [melanoma of the skin](#)⁵.

Patients who were under 45 when adrenal cancer was diagnosed have increased risks of [breast cancer](#)⁶, [bone](#)⁷ and [soft tissue sarcoma](#)⁸, [brain tumors](#)⁹, and [acute leukemia](#)¹⁰. These cancers, along with adrenal cancer, are seen in a [family cancer syndrome](#)¹¹ called Li-Fraumeni syndrome.

Follow-up after treatment

After completing treatment for adrenal cancer, you should still see your doctor regularly and may have tests to look for signs the cancer has come back or spread. Experts do not recommend any additional testing to look for second cancers in patients without symptoms. Let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer coming back or by a new disease or second cancer.

Survivors of adrenal cancer should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)¹² and [stay away from tobacco products](#)¹³. Smoking increases the risk of many cancers.

To [help maintain good health](#)¹⁴, adrenal cancer survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Keep physically active and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a healthy eating pattern that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly

processed foods.

- Not drink [alcohol](#)¹⁵. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some other health problems.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)¹⁶ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/bladder-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/bone-cancer.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/soft-tissue-sarcoma.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-adults.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/leukemia.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/genetics/family-cancer-syndromes.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
13. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html
14. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity.html
15. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
16. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/second-cancers-in-adults.html

References

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