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After Esophagus 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.

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Living as an Esophagus Cancer Survivor

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

For other people, the esophagus cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, 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.

Follow-up care

Even if you have completed treatment, your doctor will still want to watch you closely. It's very important to go to all your follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask if you are having any problems and may do exams and lab tests or imaging tests to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some might last only a few days or weeks, but others might last a long time. Some might not even show up until years after you have finished treatment. Your doctor visits are a good time to ask questions and talk about any changes or problems you notice or concerns you have.

It's very important to report any new symptoms to the doctor right away, especially if they include trouble swallowing or chest pain because this could be from the cancer coming back or late side effects of treatment. Early treatment of these problems can relieve many symptoms and improve your quality of life. New symptoms or problems could also be caused by a new disease or a second cancer.

Doctor visits

To some extent, the frequency of follow up visits and tests will depend on the stage of your cancer, the treatment you received, and the chance of it coming back.

Many doctors recommend follow-up visits with a physical exam (w2uqa .tat yflude trou1any Frty of bs

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need 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
- Suggestions for things you can do that might improve your health and possibly lower your chances of the cancer coming back (such diet changes and increasing physical activity).
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Help for common problems

Supportive treatments are aimed at helping to relieve the symptoms of esophagus cancer. In some cases they are used along with other treatments that focus on curing the cancer, but are often used in people with advanced cancer to help improve their quality of life.

Trouble swallowing

Cancer of the esophagus often causes trouble swallowing, which can lead to weight loss and weakness due to poor nutrition. A team of doctors and nutritionists can work with you to provide nutritional supplements and information about your individual nutritional needs during and after treatment. Certain surgeries to treat esophageal cancer can also affect your eating habits and may make gaining weight difficult. Your cancer care team can give you suggestions such as eating small frequent meals, using nutritional supplements, and other advice to help you maintain your weight and nutritional intake. For more information and nutrition tips for during and after cancer treatment, see [Nutrition for People With Cancer²](#).

Some people with esophageal cancer treated with surgery or radiation therapy to the esophagus may have later problems with an esophageal stricture (narrowing of the esophagus). This can be helped with procedures to open this area such as placing an esophageal stent or sometimes using esophageal dilatation.

Pain

There are many ways to control pain caused by cancer of the esophagus and its treatment. If you have pain, tell your cancer care team right away, so they can give you

Can I lower the risk of my esophagus cancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) esophageal cancer, you probably want to know if there are things you can do (aside from your treatment) that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as getting or staying active, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements.

At this time, not enough is known about esophagus cancer to say for sure if there are things you can do that will be helpful.

It is clear that [smoking](#)⁷ and [drinking alcohol](#)⁸ are linked to an increased risk of esophageal cancer. While it's not clear if smoking can affect esophageal cancer growth or recurrence, it is still helpful to stop smoking to lower your risk of getting other smoking-related cancers. Not smoking and avoiding alcohol can also help improve your appetite and overall health and help you tolerate chemotherapy and radiation better. If you need [help quitting smoking](#)⁹, talk to your doctor or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or some combination of these might be options. Other types of treatment might also be used to help relieve any symptoms from the cancer. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treating Esophageal Cancer by Stage](#)¹².

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹³.

Getting emotional support

It's normal to feel depressed, anxious, or worried when esophagus cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from help and support from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)¹⁴.

Second cancers after treatment

Cancer survivors can be affected by many health problems, but often a major concern is facing cancer again. Cancer that comes back after treatment is called a *recurrence*. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a *second cancer*.

Unfortunately, being treated for cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had esophagus cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, they might be at a higher risk of certain types of cancer, including:

- [Cancers of the mouth and throat](#)¹⁵
 - [Cancer of the larynx \(voice box\)](#)¹⁶
-

cancer.

Can I lower my risk of getting a second cancer?

There are steps you can take to lower your risk and stay as healthy as possible. For example, the most [common risk factors for cancer of the esophagus](#)²¹ are smoking and alcohol intake, which are also linked to many of the second cancers listed above. Staying away from tobacco products and limiting alcohol may help lower your risk of a second cancer.

To help maintain good health, esophageal cancer survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Keep physically active and limit sitting or lying down time
- Follow a healthy eating pattern that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and that limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods.
- It's best not to drink alcohol. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men.

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

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)²² for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/nutrition.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/esophagus-cancer/treating/palliative-therapy.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/financial-insurance-matters.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-

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9. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html
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13. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/recurrence.html
14. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html
15. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html
16. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/laryngeal-and-hypopharyngeal-cancer.html
17. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html
www.cancer.org/cancer/types/thyroidrg/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html

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