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# After Pancreatic Cancer Treatment

## Living as a Cancer Survivor

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

- [Living as a Pancreatic Cancer Survivor](#)

## Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it's very common to worry about the risk of developing another cancer.

- [Second Cancers After Pancreatic Cancer](#)

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# Living as a Pancreatic Cancer Survivor

For some people with pancreatic 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 very common if you've had cancer.

For many people with pancreatic cancer, the cancer might never go away completely, or it might come back in another part of the body. These people may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to help keep the

cancer under control for as long as possible. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

## Follow-up care

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

Some treatment side effects might last a long time or 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 important for all pancreatic cancer survivors, to let their health care team know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer [coming back](#)<sup>1</sup> or by a new disease or second cancer.

## Doctor visits and tests

Your schedule of doctor visits, exams, and tests will depend on the original extent of your cancer, how it was treated, and other factors. Most often, for people with no signs of cancer remaining, many doctors recommend follow-up visits (which may include CT scans and blood tests) about every 3 months for the first couple of years after treatment and then about every 6 months for the next several years. Be sure to follow your doctor's advice about follow-up tests.

## Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a survivorship care plan for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- 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
- A schedule for other tests you might need, such as tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- Suggestions for things you can do that might improve your health, including possibly lowering your chances of the cancer coming back

## Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even if you've finished treatment, it's very important to keep [health insurance](#)<sup>2</sup>. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think of their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to keep copies of your medical records to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records](#)<sup>3</sup>.

## Help with nutrition and pain

Pancreatic cancer often causes weight loss and weakness from poor nutrition. These symptoms might be caused by treatment or by the cancer itself. A team of doctors and nutritionists can work with you to provide nutritional supplements and information about your individual nutritional needs. This can help you keep up your weight and nutritional intake. Many patients need to take pancreatic enzymes in pill form to help digest food so that it can be absorbed. For serious nutrition problems, the doctor might need to put a feeding tube into the stomach to improve nutrition and energy levels. This is usually temporary. For more information and nutrition tips for during and after cancer treatment, see [Nutrition for the Person With Cancer](#)<sup>4</sup>.

There are many [ways to control pain caused by pancreatic cancer](#)<sup>5</sup>. If you have pain, tell your cancer care team right away, so they can give you prompt and effective pain management.

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

If you have (or have had) pancreatic cancer, you probably want to know if there are things 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, it's not yet clear if there are things you can do that will help.

Tobacco use has clearly been linked to pancreatic cancer, so not smoking may 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](#)<sup>6</sup> and need help, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

Other healthy behaviors such as [eating well, getting regular physical activity](#)<sup>7</sup>, and

[staying at a healthy weight](#)<sup>8</sup> might help as well, but no one knows for sure. However, we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of cancer.

## About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)<sup>9</sup> (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of pancreatic 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 your cancer does come back at some point, your treatment options will depend on the where the cancer is, what treatments you've had before, and your health. Treatment options might include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or some combination of these. See [Treatment of Pancreatic Cancer, Based on Extent of the Cancer](#)<sup>10</sup>.

For more general information on recurrence, see [Understanding Recurrence](#)<sup>11</sup>.

## Second cancers after treatment

People who've had pancreatic cancer can still get other cancers. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Pancreatic Cancer](#).

## Getting emotional support

Some amount of feeling [depressed, anxious, or worried](#)<sup>12</sup> is normal when pancreatic 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](#)<sup>13</sup>.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/treating/pain-control.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/treating/pain-control.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/treating/by-stage.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/treating/by-stage.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html)
12. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/coping.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/coping.html)
13. [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html)

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Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020

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## Second Cancers After Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic cancer survivors can be affected by a number of 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 develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a *second cancer*.

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

Studies looking at the second cancers pancreatic cancer survivors can get are not easy to do, mainly because of the poor outcomes related to pancreatic cancer. The little information that is known shows that there is an increased risk of:

- [Thyroid cancer](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Small Intestine Cancer](#)<sup>2</sup>

For people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer younger than 50 years of age, there appears to be an increased risk of [lung cancer](#)<sup>3</sup>. This is believed to be related to smoking.

Exactly how high the risk is of these second cancers is not known at this time.

### Follow-up after pancreatic cancer treatment

After completing treatment, you should still see your doctor regularly. Report any new

symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer spreading or coming back, or by a new disease or second cancer.

Pancreatic cancer survivors should also follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)<sup>4</sup>, such as those for colorectal, breast, cervical, and prostate cancer. Screening tests can find some cancers early, when they are likely to be treated more successfully. For people who have had pancreatic cancer, most experts don't recommend any additional testing to look for second cancers unless you have symptoms or if you or your family have an [inherited genetic syndrome](#)<sup>5</sup>.

## 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, people who have had pancreatic cancer should do their best to [stay away from tobacco products](#)<sup>6</sup>. Not smoking lowers the chance of developing most lung cancers, and may help decrease the possibility of a new pancreatic cancer from forming.

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

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)<sup>7</sup>
- Keep [physically active](#)<sup>8</sup> and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)<sup>9</sup> 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](#)<sup>10</sup>. 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](#)<sup>11</sup> for more information about causes of second cancers.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroid-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroid-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/small-intestine-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/small-intestine-cancer.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html)

5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html)

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