



Can Cancer Be Cured?

Whether a person's cancer can be cured depends on the type and stage of the cancer, the type of treatment they can get, and other factors. Some cancers are more likely to be cured than others. But each cancer needs to be treated differently. There isn't one cure for cancer.

Cure versus remission

A **cure** means that the cancer has gone away with treatment, no more treatment is needed, and the cancer is not expected to come back. It's rare that a doctor can be sure that cancer will never come back. In most cases it takes time to know if the cancer might come back. But, the longer a person is cancer free, the better the chance that the cancer will not come back. More often, when treatment appears to be successful, doctors will say the cancer is "in remission," rather than "cured."

Remission is a period of time when the cancer is responding to treatment or is under control. Some people think that remission means the cancer has been cured, but that may not be the case.

- In a **complete remission**, all the signs and symptoms of cancer go away, and cancer cells can't be found by any tests.
- In a **partial remission**, the cancer shrinks but doesn't completely go away.

Remissions can last anywhere from weeks to years. Treatment may or may not continue during a remission, depending on the type of cancer. Complete remissions may go on for years and, over time, the cancer may be thought to be cured. If the cancer returns ([recurrence](#)¹), another remission may be possible with more treatment.

What do survival statistics mean?

When told they have cancer, many people ask their doctor what their chance of survival is. While there are many factors that go into an answer, there are statistics that may help. Statistics are numbers that describe what happens to large groups of people with the same diagnosis. Statistics cannot be applied to a specific person but may give some idea of what to expect.

Here are some statistics that are used for cancer:

- **Survival rate:** the percentage of people who are alive at a certain time after diagnosis.
- **Overall survival rate:** the percentage of people with a certain type and stage of cancer who have not died from any cause during a period of time after diagnosis.
- **Cancer (or disease)-specific survival rate:** the percentage of people with a certain type and stage of cancer who have not died from their cancer during a set period of time after diagnosis.
- **5-year relative survival rate:** the percentage of people who will be alive 5 years after diagnosis. It does not include those who die from other diseases.

Survival rates can describe any length of time. However, researchers usually look at 5-year relative survival rates.

What does it mean to be a cancer survivor?

There is more than one definition of **cancer survivor**. Some people use this term to refer to anyone who has ever been diagnosed with cancer. This is what the American Cancer Society means when we talk about [survivorship](#)² or living as a cancer survivor.

But some people use the term “survivor” for someone who has completed cancer treatment. And still others might only call a person a survivor if they have lived several years past a cancer diagnosis. Remember though, that treatment lasts longer for some people, and not everyone completes treatment. Some people may live for many years with cancer as a chronic disease.

Others who are impacted, like family and friends, might also sometimes be considered cancer survivors.

Being a cancer survivor means different things for different people. Some people will be cancer free after treatment but may experience late and long term side effects of treatment. Others may be cancer free after treatment but have their cancer come back and need to be treated again. Still others will need to continue with cancer treatment to

keep their cancer under control. But anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer needs care that focuses on their unique needs.

Not everyone likes to be called a cancer survivor. Each person has the right to define their experience with cancer. So, anyone who describes themselves as a cancer survivor should be considered one.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/long-term-health-concerns/recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment.html

References

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