

# Live—and Live Well— Beyond Cancer

Surviving cancer is more complicated than simply being sick or healthy, having cancer or being cancer-free. Cancer survivorship is a day-to-day, ongoing process that begins with your diagnosis and continues through the rest of your life. *Living beyond cancer means striving to be as healthy as possible within your personal circumstances.*

## Maintaining Your Health

Survivorship may extend for months, years, and even decades. Little is known about how to prevent the late effects of cancer, so it's extremely important that you monitor your health and develop a plan for life after cancer:

- Ask your doctor or nurse to help you develop a written treatment summary and monthly or yearly follow-up plan.
- Get the name of someone you can call if you become anxious or have questions.
- Ask for photocopies of your medical records, including surgery, pathology, and x-ray films and reports. Also gather details of all cancer treatments, such as the doses of chemotherapy drugs and the amount and location of radiation therapy.
- Keep track of your medical history so you will be able to supply a detailed account to any health care provider you see in the future.
- Go to a long-term follow-up clinic, sometimes called a “late effects” or “survivor” clinic, if one is available to you. (Cancer Survivors Project [www.cancersurvivorsproject.org](http://www.cancersurvivorsproject.org) lists clinics across the country.)

## Fostering Intimacy

Intimacy and fertility issues are often neglected topics for cancer survivors. During and after treatment, survivors may experience changes in their desire to be close to other people, in their levels of sexual desire and ability to enjoy sexual activity, and in their ability to have children. It is important to address these issues with your doctor and, possibly, with a mental health professional. Also, various fertility options can be explored through groups such as Fertile Hope at [www.fertilehope.org](http://www.fertilehope.org).

## Enriching Family Relationships

Researchers have found that some of the harshest realities that cancer survivors face are the reactions of the people closest to them. Open communication and mutual respect on the part of both survivor and family members are vital elements for creating a healing environment.

## Dealing with Emotions

While many survivors will recover physically, they may have difficulty recovering from the emotional traumas that result from cancer and cancer treatment. Researchers have found that about one-third of cancer survivors experience anxiety or depression serious enough to require professional intervention. If you are experiencing emotional distress, you owe it to yourself to get help.

On the positive side, many survivors find themselves reevaluating their lives and shifting their priorities. They might experience a new zest and appreciation for life after moving past their painful experiences.

## Getting Your House in Order

If it is important to you to “get your house in order”—to secure your future wishes through financial planning and by drafting a will and health care directives—consult a lawyer to work with you, and tell your family that you are making these plans.

There are two important legal documents that concern your future health care. A living will tells your doctors what medical care you want in case you’re unable to speak for yourself. A durable power of attorney for health care lets you name someone to make health care decisions for you if you become unable to do so.

## Living with Hope, Dealing with Uncertainty

After being diagnosed with cancer, you may find yourself feeling insecure about your future. The good news is that studies show cancer survivors to be among the most resilient people when it comes to the ability to recover emotionally and regain optimism after trauma—and they can learn to be hopeful about the future.

The distinction between optimism and hopefulness is an important one for survivors. Optimism means emphasizing the positive aspects of a situation. Hope, on the other hand, is a way of feeling, a way of thinking, a way of behaving, and a way of relating to others. Hope is a necessary element for coping and healing.

## Resources:

NATIONAL COALITION FOR CANCER SURVIVORSHIP

“Cancer Survival Toolbox”

[www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox)

Visit the following section:

*Living Beyond Cancer.*

“Post-Treatment Guide”

[www.canceradvocacy.org/resources/treatment-issues/post-treatment.html](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/resources/treatment-issues/post-treatment.html)

“You Have the Right to Be Hopeful”

[www.canceradvocacy.org/resources/publications/hopeful.pdf](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/resources/publications/hopeful.pdf)

THE TRUTH ABOUT CANCER IS  
A CAROUSEL FILMS LLC PRODUCTION  
FOR WGBH BOSTON



FUNDING FOR THE TRUTH ABOUT CANCER  
PROVIDED BY THE JOHN WAYNE CANCER FOUNDATION  
AND SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE



ADDITIONAL FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE  
CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING  
AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS



A private corporation funded  
by the American people

THE TRUTH ABOUT CANCER IS  
THE THIRD INSTALLMENT OF THE  
PBS TAKE ONE STEP HEALTH CAMPAIGN

