

## **LIFE AFTER TREATMENT**

Completing treatment for cancer is an accomplishment. You may feel a great sense of relief as some of the anxiety and discomfort subside and the inconvenience is over. After thinking about cancer every waking moment during treatment, you need to resolve a few issues as you begin to recover physically and move on with your life. First and foremost, establish your treatment follow-up strategy and make sure that you feel comfortable with the management of any long-term side effects. Then, find resources to help you cope with financial and emotional issues.

### **Follow-Up Strategy**

Follow-up care is necessary to manage treatment complications and to detect potential cancer recurrence early, when it is most treatable. Discuss your post-treatment strategy in detail with your medical team to determine your follow-up schedule. Also, find out if your post-treatment strategy includes periodic tests. For example, your follow-up care may require periodic CT scans, MRIs or X-rays to monitor and note any suspicious changes. Similarly, if your disease is associated with a blood marker, you may have periodic blood tests to monitor blood marker levels. In addition to periodic tests, you may want to discuss your prognosis as well as symptoms of recurrence that are cause for further follow-up. Also, make sure that you have established a way to contact your doctor or nurse as additional questions and concerns arise.

### **Long-Term Side Effects**

Long-term side effects from treatment may be minor or imposing. Understanding what side effects may occur and determining the best way to manage these side effects on a permanent basis is important. Your treating doctor may not be a specialist in the management of long-term side effects so you may request a referral. For example, if the surgical treatment of your disease has left you physically challenged, your follow-up care may require a physical therapist. Or, if you have had a lymph node dissection, the management or prevention of lymphedema may best be handled by someone other than your surgeon.

### **Post Treatment Financial Issues**

Cost of treatment may impose an ongoing financial stress and burden. Post-treatment financial issues may include disputes with your insurance, as well as debt incurred from out of pocket expenses or an inability to work during treatment. Patient advocate organizations offer valuable information to help patients with these issues. For more information about insurance issues, job discrimination or patient assistance programs, go to [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org) or other patient advocate organizations.

## **Support**

After completing cancer treatment, you may feel elated and relieved as you recover and side effects diminish. Although your life may return to normal, the unknown and the statistics may still weigh on your mind from time to time. To cope with emotional issues, you may wish to seek professional support, family support, as well as support from other patients with your disease. Patients recommend reading other patient stories, telling your story and researching breaking news concerning your disease. These processes have been facilitated by the involvement of the Internet's disease specific sites, bulletin boards and chat rooms. Patients also indicate that community support groups are a valuable resource for emotional support. Acknowledging your experience through these outlets may provide some sense of relief and validation.

Defining your post-treatment strategy, understanding management of long-term side effects, seeking support for financial issues and coping with emotional issues are all important components of your post treatment plan. Since thinking about cancer may consume you as you go through treatment, letting go and moving on may be difficult. However, an effective post-treatment strategy may help you cope with emotional and physical side effects, as well as facilitate early identification of cancer recurrence when it is most treatable.