

WELLBEING DURING CANCER TREATMENT

It is vital that you maintain your physical and psychological wellbeing during cancer treatment. It is normal that you may feel better on some days and not so good on others. It may be worth considering the points listed below to help look after yourself.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Not all side effects of head and neck cancer and its treatment are physical.

- You may also experience a number of different emotions during and after your diagnosis. These may include feeling angry, stressed, worried or depressed.
- After treatment, you may also feel afraid that your cancer could come back or feel sad about changes to the way you look.
- All of these feelings are normal. There is no right or wrong way to feel about living with cancer. The important thing is that you talk to your family and friends about how you are feeling, or ask your [cancer care team](#) about where you can find additional support.
- If you have continued feelings of sadness, have difficulty getting out of bed in the morning or have lost the desire to do things that you used to enjoy, you may be suffering from depression. This is quite common among people who have had cancer and it is important that you contact your family doctor to discuss your symptoms and possible treatment options.

NUTRITION

Healthy eating is associated with many health and wellbeing benefits. This is especially the case for people with cancer as the condition and its treatment place extra demands on the body.

- While there is no special ‘cancer diet’, good nutrition will help you cope better with your illness by increasing energy and strength, help you achieve or maintain a healthy body weight, and improve your mood.
- In some cases, people with head and neck cancer may have difficulty eating and drinking due to the cancer itself or side effects of treatment. In these cases, a dietitian can help work out the best things to eat and drink. This may include nutritional supplement drinks, which help to prevent weight loss and malnutrition.

You may want to download further information about [diet and nutrition](#), which is available on the [Beyond Five website](#).

EXERCISE

Regular exercise during and after treatment for head and neck cancer can help you feel better and recover more quickly.

- Benefits of exercise may include feeling stronger, more energetic, less anxious or worried, as well as having increased self-esteem, improved circulation and better sleep.
- Whether you’re just starting to exercise or are continuing an exercise routine, it is a good idea to talk with your [cancer care team](#) about the type and amount of exercise that is best for you.
- You may be referred to an exercise physiologist or physiotherapist who can help develop an exercise program tailored for your specific needs.

You may want to download further information about [exercise](#), which is available on the [Beyond Five website](#).

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Complementary therapies aim to treat the ‘whole person’ and not just head and neck cancer.

- Complementary therapies may help you cope with specific symptoms, reduce your side effects, help you feel more relaxed and improve your mood.
- Examples of complementary therapies used in head and neck cancer include acupuncture, massage, meditation, relaxation techniques and yoga.

You may want to download further information about [complementary therapies](#), which is available on the [Beyond Five website](#).

FOLLOW-UP CARE

Typically, if a head and neck cancer is going to recur it does so within the first few years after treatment (although this is not always the case).

- You may be closely followed up by your [cancer care team](#) for at least 5 years, at which time many cancers are considered to be cured.
- The regular checkup may involve a physical examination, and in some cases imaging tests, such as ultrasound (US), computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or positron emission tomography (PET) scans.
- A dentist may also play an important role in follow-up care for your mouth following treatment for head and neck cancer. Visit the dentist every 6 months for a check-up after treatment, particularly if you have had radiation therapy as the side effects on the teeth may be long lasting.
- Your doctor may also recommend that you continue to see a dietitian, exercise physiologist, physiotherapist, psychologist, sexual therapist, supportive care specialist or complementary health practitioner based on your individual needs.
- It is important to see your [cancer care team](#) for regular follow-up visits to ensure that if the cancer comes back, it can be detected and treated early.
- Contact your doctor if you have any concerns between visits.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Looking after your emotional wellbeing is just as important as your physical health. And remember, you are not alone. There are a number of support services available to help you.

- Psychologists are experts in feelings and emotions and they can talk with you about how you are feeling, and help you with strategies to manage the things that you find challenging in your daily life.
- Sexual therapists can help you find solutions to issues with sexuality and intimacy as cancer may affect your sexuality in both physical and emotional ways.
- People who have been in a similar situation to you may be of assistance to you by sharing their experiences. Face-to-face and online support groups are available to help you connect with these people.
- The Cancer Council also provides an information and support line to Australians affected by cancer. You can call 13 11 20 to speak with a specialist cancer professional about anything to do with your cancer.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

- Who should I contact if I'm worried about my diagnosis, treatment or prognosis?
- What psychological support or counselling is available?
- Are there patient support groups in my area?
- What help is available for my family and friends?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help me?
- How can I stay healthy and reduce the risk of the cancer coming back?
- Is there someone you can refer me to for advice on diet, nutrition and exercise?

You may want to write additional questions here to ask your doctor or cancer care team

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