

Cancer Survivorship Involves Many Moving Parts



There's nothing better than surviving cancer. Some of us endure a long, drawn-out treatment process to emerge at the other end of the tunnel. Others might only need surgery, with or without follow-up chemotherapy or radiation treatments. For many of us, returning to our lives is more than just returning to our old routines.

Physical Changes

Depending on the type and extent of the treatment, you may need to cope with physical changes for the rest of your life. This could be anything from minor nerve damage to major heart damage or an amputation. You may need long-term follow-up care with a specialist and physical therapy. Both men and women may lose the ability to have a child. A woman may start menopause earlier in her life than normal.

One of those changes may be a secondary cancer caused by chemotherapy and/or radiation treatment. When you have cancer, you should be warned of these possible long-term side effects. But, at the time, what may or may not happen years later is not much of a concern. That potential, distant threat becomes a reality for some of us over time.

Intellectual Changes

"Chemo brain" is the term cancer patients use for memory problems, mental fog, and an inability to focus or concentrate during treatment. Medications could cause it, the stress of treatment, or a combination. Most of us come back to our intellectual normal. But, for a few, this can be a chronic problem.

Psychological and Emotional Effects

We're happy to survive, but survival can be a mixed bag emotionally and psychologically. The more stressful and traumatic the disease and treatment, the more risk there is of depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome. People may live in fear and have flashbacks of situations that no one wants to remember. The person may be unable to sleep and constantly be on edge.

Some survivors have "survivor's guilt" because a friend or family member died of cancer while they did not. Cancer patients often ask themselves, "Why me?" after a diagnosis. Some who survive also ask themselves, "Why me?"

Financial Burdens

Your medical recovery and health post-treatment may be remarkable, but the financial cost may be catastrophic. You took unpaid time off or lost your job. You may have long-term side effects that limit your ability to earn a living.

If you have insurance, you may need to pay thousands of dollars in co-pays. An insurer may be reluctant to pay for certain treatments or



medications, forcing you to foot the bill. You may need to spend thousands before you get any coverage. Many cancer survivors have discovered that a cancer-related loss of income, expenses, and medical bills can push you off a financial cliff and result in filing for bankruptcy.

Help Is Available

If you or your family are struggling with a cancer diagnosis or survivorship, the Cancer Support Community Greater Philadelphia is a great place to start the conversation about how to cope with and get past the obstacles you face. Check out our website at www.cancersupportphiladelphia.org or give us a call at 215-441-3290.




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