

THIS IS **LIVING WITH CANCER**[™]

Managing cancer at an older age

Managing cancer at an older age brings about new challenges. While some challenges are directly related to the cancer, others are natural and the result of getting older. There may be some days when you feel like you're alone in all this—but you're not. Did you know that 50% of all new cancer diagnoses are in people aged 65 and older? **That means there are many other older adults like you who are facing similar challenges.**

With support from your healthcare team and people who love you, you can develop a treatment plan that fits your lifestyle and goals. **Use this guide to learn how to help manage the challenges of cancer while aging.**



Finding support



PARTNER WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

Your relationship with your healthcare team can make a big difference in how you cope with cancer. Research shows that people who work closely with their healthcare team on treatment decisions **are more likely to stick with treatment**. Think of your doctor and healthcare team as partners who are there for you through each step of your journey.

The more comfortable you are talking with your doctor, the greater the role you can play in your treatment decisions. With different kinds of treatments and new developments in cancer research, there's no longer a one-size-fits-all treatment plan. **You have every right to ask as many questions as you need** until you feel comfortable and confident in your plan.



KEEP THEM UPDATED ON OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS

Aging is a natural process, but as a result, other medical conditions may develop. Because of this, you can expect your healthcare team to conduct something that's often called a **health assessment**. This may consist of several questions and tests that will help your team get a better sense of your overall health. They will look at factors, such as vision, hearing, eating habits, activity levels, memory, medicines that you're taking and your physical and emotional health.

Some symptoms, such as fatigue or sore throat, may or may not be related to your cancer. Having other conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetes may mean that **certain cancer treatments aren't a good choice for you**. Once your healthcare team has a better understanding of your overall health, they can help you **set treatment goals that work for you**.



MAKE DECISIONS WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

Communicating with your healthcare team is very important. After your diagnosis, it's a good idea to **set treatment goals with your team** that you're comfortable with. This will help make sure you and your team are on the same page in terms of treatment, care and expectations.

Having someone with you at your medical appointments who knows you well may help you feel empowered and in control. If possible, bring a family member or friend who can take notes, ask questions and help you understand and remember important details.

During appointments, you and your care partner should remember to:

- **Ask questions** if your healthcare team says anything that doesn't make sense or seems unclear
- **Ask for things to be explained again**, or in a different way, if you don't understand the answer
- **Ask what a medical term or word means** if you're not familiar with it

To learn more about **preparing for your appointments and health assessment**, [click here](#).

Caring for yourself

MAKE GOOD NUTRITION SECOND NATURE

Cancer treatment and aging can affect your eating habits and dietary needs. You may find that you can't eat as much anymore, or you're not as hungry. Your ability to smell, taste and digest food may change, too. Because of this, you may not properly absorb important nutrients, so you may need more vitamins and minerals. For example, you may need vitamin D and calcium to help keep your bones and teeth strong.

With all these changes, **it's important to work with your healthcare team so they can help you maintain a healthy diet.**



TIPS FOR GOOD NUTRITION:

Remember to speak to your healthcare provider before making changes to your diet or lifestyle.

- **Include healthy protein in your diet**, such as lean meat, eggs, unsalted nuts, seeds and beans. Protein can help with healing and make you stronger
- **Look for whole grains** like brown rice and quinoa. They contain important nutrients that help produce energy, support your nervous system and immune system and may help to regulate bowels because of the fiber they provide
- **Choose fruits and vegetables**, which are filled with vitamins and nutrients and are generally low in calories. Cooked fruits and vegetables may be easier to tolerate than raw ones, so try steaming, sautéing, roasting or puréeing
- **Be mindful of refined carbohydrates**, such as sugar and white flour, which can raise blood sugar
- **Drink plenty of fluids** like water, juices, broth and ice pops to stay properly hydrated and to help ease constipation and fatigue

KEEP YOUR BODY MOVING

As you age, keeping your body moving becomes even more important. **Physical activity is important for your overall health and wellness**, even during cancer treatment. Even simple movements can help, and it's important to make physical activity part of your everyday life.

The first step is to talk to your healthcare team to decide what activities are best for you. If you weren't active before your cancer diagnosis, you may need to take things slowly in the beginning. If you were already active, you may need to take care and do things more slowly. Your healthcare team will be able to guide you as to what type of movements are best.

Together with your team, **you can create an exercise plan that fits your lifestyle, physical condition and comfort level**. And if you don't like to exercise alone, consider pairing up with someone who can help you stay motivated.



EXERCISE MAY HELP YOU:

- Feel less tired
- Breathe easier
- Maintain memory
- Feel healthier
- Improve your balance and physical function
- Help muscle strength
- Continue your normal activities

RELAX THE MIND AND BODY

If you've never tried meditation or quiet thought, give it a chance. As you get older, techniques such as meditation can be great to add to your daily routine. You can do it in your own home or in a group, and you don't need any special equipment. **Meditation could help release some of the stress you're feeling** and allow you time to think about things that make you happy.

KEEP SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Staying social can improve your overall outlook on life. **When you interact with others, especially your peers, you're more likely to have a sense of belonging and your mind is more likely to stay sharp**. Spending time with others can also reduce your risk for other conditions.

Look for ways to stay in touch with friends, family and former coworkers if you're retired. Hop on a phone call, watch your grandkids for the afternoon, grab a bite to eat with friends, go for a walk or even write notes to share your thoughts. You can also find a [local support group](#), attend community center events or join a recreational club to meet others with similar experiences and interests. Local libraries, senior centers and religious organizations can also be resources to help you stay active and social.

Expanding your social circle

Everyone with cancer may need help at some point, and as you age your needs may change. Your close friends and family may not live nearby, making it difficult for them to offer the kind of support you need. You may have stopped driving and need rides to medical appointments, or you might want some help with grocery shopping. Whatever level of help you need, **it's important for you to feel comfortable reaching out and expanding your circle of support.**



RIDES AND LODGING

The American Cancer Society* offers two programs that can help you find rides and lodging:

Road to Recovery

Provides transportation to and from treatment for people with cancer who do not have a ride or are unable to drive themselves.

Hope Lodge

Offers eligible patients and their caregivers a place to stay overnight when getting treatment away from home.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Many different senior support services are available, so reach out to them directly to learn more about what they could offer you. From providing hot meals to finding additional help in your area, below are several resources that may meet your needs. Ask a friend or family member if you need help reaching out to them.

Meals on Wheels

Delivers nutritious food to nearly 2.4 million older adults each year and can keep you connected to volunteers in your community.

Find a local program by calling **1-888-998-6325** or visit [**mealsonwheelsamerica.org**](http://mealsonwheelsamerica.org).

SAGE

Advocates for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) elders nationwide and offers a wide range of services and resources, local programs and outreach initiatives.

Visit [**sageusa.org**](http://sageusa.org) to learn more.

*The American Cancer Society (ACS) operates independently and is not controlled by Pfizer. Availability of services and eligibility requirements are determined solely by the ACS.

Health in Aging Foundation

Brings the knowledge and expertise of geriatrics healthcare professionals to the public. This is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1999 by the American Geriatrics Society.

For more information, visit healthinaging.org.

Eldercare

Provides information on a variety of local resources for older adults and their families.

Speak with an Information Specialist by calling 1-800-677-1116 or visit eldercare.acl.gov.

Understanding your health assessment

You may be wondering what a health assessment is. **It's a series of tests that your doctor runs and usually includes some questions that you will need to answer.** They may do this as part of a formal medical evaluation or informally as you're talking. Although your doctor may not always call it a health assessment, it's a common way for your team to get a better picture of your overall health. **It also helps them gather important information about you,** so together you can map out a treatment plan that fits your lifestyle and treatment goals.

It's really important to take an active role in this assessment. Be as honest as you can, even if it's hard to admit that your habits or lifestyle may have changed over time or that you may not be feeling "like yourself."



SAMPLE TOPICS TO GET YOU THINKING

Below are a few topics that you may want to discuss during your health assessment. Print out this page and bring it with you to your next appointment as a helpful reminder of things to discuss with your healthcare team.



Activity level:

Your healthcare team may ask what type of exercise you do, how often you're active and for how long and your general energy level. They may also ask if you can manage daily activities and chores—from getting dressed and bathing to doing housekeeping and shopping—and if you're doing these on your own or need help from a loved one. This information can help them create an exercise plan that's right for you.



Mood and mental state:

Your healthcare team may also want to learn of any changes in your mood, especially if you feel nervous, anxious or depressed. That way they can connect you to a counselor, support group or psychiatrist who can help you if you need it. Your mood and emotions can impact how you feel physically, so it's important to take care of your mental health, too.



Life outside of treatment:

Other lifestyle factors can also affect how you respond to treatment. Getting a sense of any stress caused by finances, family, relationships or work, if you're not retired, can help your healthcare team figure out how to tackle challenges together.



Quality of sleep:

When it comes to your health, sleep affects many aspects. It's important to share the quality of sleep you get, how many hours you sleep at night, whether you nap during the day and if you snore, which often affects your sleep. Sharing this information can help your healthcare team make suggestions for improving your sleep quality.

SHARE UPDATES AND ASK QUESTIONS

At your next doctor's visit, be sure to **share any updates, including any newly prescribed or over-the-counter medicines or supplements.** Also, be ready to share any new symptoms you're feeling, experiences with treatment, or changes in your personal life that you think may be important for your healthcare team to know. All of these updates can affect the next steps of your treatment, which you and your doctor should discuss.

Here are a few questions that can help you and your doctor develop a treatment plan:

- Can you explain all my treatment choices, not just your recommendation?
- How will this treatment impact my daily life?
- What are the possible side effects, and what should I do if I experience them?
- Is this treatment covered by my insurance?

Once you and your doctor have decided what treatment is appropriate for you, you may want to ask about the following:

- Where will my treatment take place?
- How long will I need to be on treatment?
- Will I need to change what I eat and drink during treatment?
- Which exercises are best while I undergo treatment?
- Are there any activities I should avoid or modify?



OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE:



Get inspiration & help at your fingertips

This Is Living With Cancer™ is an online program that shares inspiring stories and provides people living with cancer and their loved ones with tools like **LivingWith®**, a free app designed to help manage life with cancer.

LivingWith® can help you:

- Connect with loved ones
- Ask for the support you need
- Remember important information from doctors' visits
- Stay organized

Text "**Future**" to **70989** to download **LivingWith®** for free. Available in English and Spanish.



If you need assistance with how to download the app, ask for help from a loved one or friend. If you don't have a smartphone or aren't comfortable using an app, you can get support and resources on [**ThisIsLivingWithCancer.com**](https://www.thisislivingwithcancer.com).

You will receive one autodialed marketing message per request. Message & data rates may apply. Text "HELP" for additional support. Terms & Conditions: [ThisIsLivingWithCancer.com/termsandconditions](https://www.thisislivingwithcancer.com/termsandconditions). Reply "STOP" to cancel. The **LivingWith®** app is available to all patients and their loved ones and is not specific to any products.

App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. Google Play and the Google Play logo are trademarks of Google LLC.