

What to expect during cancer treatment

Millions of people across the globe are diagnosed with cancer every year. While that's disheartening, it's important to note that the five-year survival rates for many types of cancers is very high. In fact, the American Society of Clinical Oncology notes that, within the United States, there are currently more than 15.5 million people alive with a history of cancer.

Cancer treatments continue to evolve as researchers learn more about the disease. Patients can play active roles in their treatments, and those roles begin at diagnosis. Learning what to expect during treatment can help patients and their families prepare for and overcome the challenges that await them.

- **Expect side effects.** The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that, regardless of which type of treatment patients receive, side effects are to be expected. Those side effects may depend on which treatments are chosen by your cancer team. Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells, while radiation therapy employs radiation to produce

the same result. Each is effective, but each treatment also can damage healthy cells, leading to side effects such as fatigue, hair loss, nausea, and infection. Patients can discuss potential side effects of treatments with their physicians as well as their support networks, the latter of which can devise ways to help loved ones cope with the consequences of treatment. For example, if fatigue is likely, then support networks can plan to pitch in and help with cooking, cleaning and other tasks that patients may find difficult.

- **Anticipate making changes to your diet.** Doctors may refer certain patients to dietitians. Some patients' diets may have made them more vulnerable to cancer, thereby necessitating both short- and long-term changes to the foods they eat. The AAFP also notes that doctors may recommend certain foods that won't make side effects of treatment worse. If possible, patients should stock up on recommended foods that won't go bad prior to treatment so they won't have to make as many trips to the grocery store,

as such trips can be difficult when combatting treatment-related fatigue.

- **Expect to get help.** Maintaining a sense of independence is important for cancer patients, but it's equally important that patients recognize no one can beat cancer on their own. Family members, friends, neighbors, and even coworkers may offer to help around the house or at the office, and such offers should be accepted.

- **Expect to slow down.** Many cancer patients receive their diagnoses during the prime of their lives, when they're fully accustomed to taking on any challenge in their personal and professional lives. But once treatment begins, beating cancer becomes the primary goal, so patients



should expect to take their foot off the gas at home and at work so they can devote themselves fully to their treatment and what they need to do to ensure treatment is as effective as possible.

Millions of people have overcome cancer, and knowing what to expect during treatment can help millions more follow suit.

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