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After Stomach Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

- [Living as a Stomach Cancer Survivor](#)

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it is very common to have questions about cancer coming back or treatment no longer working.

- [Second Cancers After Stomach Cancer](#)
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Living as a Stomach Cancer Survivor

For some people with stomach cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get chemotherapy, targeted therapy or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very

stressful.

Life after stomach cancer means returning to some familiar things and making some new choices.

Follow-up care

If you have completed treatment, your doctors will still want to watch you closely. It is very important to go to all of your follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask questions about any problems you are having and may do [exams](#)¹ and lab or [imaging tests](#)² to look for [signs](#)³ of stomach cancer or treatment side effects. Almost any cancer treatment can have [side effects](#)⁴. Some last for a few weeks to months, but others can last the rest of your life. This is the time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes or problems you notice and any questions or concerns you have.

Most doctors recommend careful follow-up, with a physical exam and review of symptoms every 3 to 6 months for the first few years, then at least yearly after that. Lab tests might also be done. Scans are not usually needed at each visit, but should be done if there are any suspicious symptoms or physical findings.

If you have had [surgery](#)⁵, your health care team may suggest that you meet with a nutritionist, who can help you adjust to changes in your eating habits.

People who have had surgery — especially if they had the upper part of their stomach removed (in either a subtotal or total gastrectomy) — will probably need to have their vitamin blood levels tested regularly and might need vitamin supplements, which could include B12 injections. (The pill form of vitamin B12 isn't absorbed if the upper part of the stomach has been removed.)

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)⁶ for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as early detection (screening) tests for other types of cancer, or tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what

- to watch for and when you should contact your doctor
- Diet and physical activity suggestions
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Nutrition

Eating right can be hard for anyone, and may have gotten tougher during cancer treatment. This is especially true for cancers that affect the digestive tract, such as stomach cancer. The cancer or its treatment can affect how you eat and absorb nutrition. [Nausea](#)⁷ can be a problem during and after some treatments, and you may have lost your appetite and some weight.

If you have lost or are losing weight, or if you are having trouble eating, do the best you can. Eat what appeals to you. Eat what you can, when you can. You might find it helps to eat small portions every 2 to 3 hours until you feel better. Now is not the time to restrict your diet. Try to keep in mind that these problems usually improve over time. Your cancer team may refer you to a dietitian, an expert in nutrition who can give you ideas on how to fight some of the side effects of your treatment.

If part or all of your stomach has been removed, you might need to eat smaller amounts of food more often. Your doctor or nutritionist may also recommend that you stay upright for some time after eating. Your health care team can help you adjust your diet if you are having problems eating.

Some patients with stomach cancer have problems with nausea, diarrhea, sweating, and flushing after eating. This is called **dumping syndrome**. When part or all of the stomach is removed, the food that is swallowed quickly passes into the intestine, leading to these symptoms after eating. These symptoms often get better over time.

Some people may need nutritional supplements to help make sure they get the nutrition they need. Some people may even need a feeding tube, usually called a **jejunostomy tube** (or **J-tube**), put into the small intestine. This is done through a small hole in the skin over the abdomen during a minor operation. A J-tube allows liquid nutrition to be put directly into the small intestine to help prevent weight loss and improve nutrition. Less often, the tube may be placed into the lower part of the stomach instead. This is known as a **gastrostomy tube** or **G-tube**.

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think of their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to keep copies of your medical records to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records](#)⁸.

Can I lower my risk of stomach cancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) stomach cancer, you probably want to know if there are things you can do that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as exercising, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements. Unfortunately, it's not yet clear if there are things you can do that will help.

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and staying at a healthy weight are linked with a lower risk of stomach cancer, but we don't know if these types of changes affect the risk of cancer progressing or coming back. However, we do know that they can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of cancer.

Tobacco use has clearly been linked to stomach cancer, so not smoking might help reduce your risk. We don't know for certain if this will help, but we do know that it can help improve your appetite and overall health. It can also reduce the chance of developing other types of cancer. If you want to quit smoking and need help, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345. You can also learn more in our [Guide to Quitting Smoking](#)⁹.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)¹⁰ (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of cancer progressing or coming back. This doesn't mean that no supplements will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that might be harmful.

If the cancer comes back

If the cancer does recur at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is located, what treatments you've had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices by Type and Stage of Stomach Cancer](#)¹¹.

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹².

Could I get a second cancer after treatment?

People who've had stomach cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, stomach cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Stomach Cancer](#)¹³.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/imaging-radiology-tests-for-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/stomach-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-symptoms.html
4. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/stomach-cancer/treating/types-of-surgery.html
6. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
7. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/nausea-and-vomiting.html
8. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html
9. <https://author-prod.cancer.org/content/cancer/en/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html>
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/stomach-cancer/treating.html
11. <https://author-prod.cancer.org/content/cancer/en/cancer/non-hodgkin-lymphoma/after-treatment/second-cancers.html>

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Kushi LH, Doyle C, McCullough M, Rock CL, Demark-Wahnefried W, Bandera EV, Gapstur S, Patel AV, Andrews K, Gansler T; American Cancer Society 2010 Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. American Cancer Society Guidelines on nutrition and physical activity for cancer prevention: reducing the risk of cancer with healthy food choices and physical activity. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2012 Jan-Feb;62(1):30-67.

Rock CL, Doyle C, Demark-Wahnefried W, Meyerhardt J, Courneya K S, Schwartz AL, Bandera E V, Hamilton KK, Grant B, McCullough M, Byers T, Gansler T. Nutrition and physical activity guidelines for cancer survivors. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2012 Jul-Aug;62(4):242–274.

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Second Cancers After Stomach Cancer

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often their greatest concern is facing cancer again. If a cancer comes back after treatment it is called a [recurrence](#)¹. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a second cancer. No matter what type of cancer you have had, it is still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Unfortunately, being treated for cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can be linked to a higher risk of certain second cancers.

Survivors of stomach cancer can get any type of second cancer. They do not get second cancers at an increased rate overall, but they do have an increased risk of cancers of the [thyroid](#)² and [small intestine](#)³.

Follow-up after treatment

After completing treatment for stomach cancer, you should still see your doctor regularly and may have tests to look for signs the cancer has come back or spread. Experts do not recommend any additional testing to look for second cancers in patients without symptoms. Let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they

could be caused by the cancer coming back or by a new disease or second cancer.

Survivors of stomach cancer should follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)⁴ and [stay away from tobacco products](#)⁵. Smoking increases the risk of many cancers.

To help maintain good health, survivors should also:

- Get ot and stay at a [healthy weight](#)⁶
- Adopt a [physically active lifestyle](#)⁷
- Eat a [healthy diet](#)⁸, with an emphasis on plant foods
- Limit [alcohol](#)⁹ to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some cancers.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)¹⁰ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroid-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/small-intestine-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
10. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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Kushi LH, Doyle C, McCullough M, Rock CL, Demark-Wahnefried W, Bandera EV, Gapstur S, Patel AV, Andrews K, Gansler T; American Cancer Society 2010 Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. American Cancer Society Guidelines on nutrition and physical activity for cancer prevention: reducing the risk of cancer with healthy food choices and physical activity. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2012 Jan-Feb;62(1):30-67.

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