



# LIVING WITH CANCER

A holistic guide to support  
your cancer journey

AT ONEPATH, WE UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY CANCER JOURNEY IS UNIQUE.

## SUPPORTING YOUR CANCER JOURNEY

A cancer diagnosis can be a frightening experience for you and your family. As with anything in life, often the more you know about what is happening to you, the less afraid you become.

This booklet will provide some basic insights into what cancer is, how it is staged and what the various treatment options are.

**We are here to help you feel healthier by supporting your whole health - physical, mental, social, and financial.**





## FINDING OUT THAT YOU HAVE CANCER

**Finding out that you have cancer can feel overwhelming. People react to the news in different ways.**

Initially it can be difficult to accept the diagnosis as real. You may find yourself asking “why me?” and feeling shocked, sad, angry, anxious, confused or worried about the future.

The impact of having cancer can be difficult and significant. However, there are various steps you can take to help come to terms with what has happened and live well during and after cancer treatment.

- 1 Understand your diagnosis** by talking to your doctors and verifying information from reputable internet sources.
- 2 Explore your treatment options** and discuss them with your doctor, family, and friends.
- 3 Keep connected with loved ones** and seek support, including joining a cancer support group and seeking practical and financial help if needed.
- 4 Focus on your wellbeing** by getting adequate rest, staying active as much as you can, eating well-balanced meals, and seeking help if experiencing depression, withdrawal, or anger.

# BREAKING THE NEWS

## TELLING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Telling the important people in your life about your diagnosis may allow you to share your anxieties and fears. It can also be a challenging and personal decision, there is no right or wrong way to share this news.

- Tell others when you feel ready.
- Ask for help from someone who is aware of your situation.
- Be prepared for questions.
- Keep boundaries you are comfortable with.

## TELLING CHILDREN

If you have children, telling them about your cancer diagnosis can be difficult, but it can also give them a chance to ask questions and express their feelings.

Here are some tips for talking to your children about cancer:

- Tell your children about your cancer diagnosis in a way that's appropriate for their age.
- If you need help telling your children, ask a family member or medical support person.
- Reassure your children that they are not at fault for your illness and that cancer is not contagious.
- Let them know that you love them and answer their questions honestly.
- Children may sense your emotions, but may not understand them. Be patient and provide comfort.

## TELLING WORK

Telling your employer and colleagues about your cancer diagnosis can be difficult but is important to make necessary arrangements.

- Schedule a meeting with your manager or HR to discuss.
- Be clear about your needs and limitations, but remain open to solutions.
- Consider flexible work arrangements, such as reduced hours or working from home.
- Discuss potential impact on workload and deadlines.
- Ask for confidentiality or control over who is informed of your diagnosis.
- Utilise resources, such as employee assistance programs and support groups.





## WHAT EXACTLY IS CANCER?

Cancer cells are normal cells in the body that have become abnormal due to some trigger. These abnormal cells have the ability to multiply quicker than normal cells and the increased volume of abnormal cell groups pushes normal cells out of the way, preventing them from doing their normal function.

Groups of abnormal cells are called a tumour. Cancer or 'carcinoma' was first described by Hippocrates, about 300 years BC, when he noticed that the cut surface of solid tumours had veins that looked like a crab or crayfish.

### BENIGN VERSUS MALIGNANT

Tumours can be benign or malignant. Benign means that the abnormal (or cancer) cells are not as aggressive as malignant cells and do not spread to other parts of the body.

Benign tumours, because they are contained, cause less disruption in normal cell functioning and can be more easily treated; they also tend not to recur. Malignant tumours contain more aggressively growing cancer cells that spread to other parts of the body causing abnormal functioning of normal cells wherever they have spread.

Distant spread of cancer cells are known as metastases.

### WHY DID I GET CANCER?

No-one knows what causes a normal cell to become abnormal at a specific point in time, but there are triggers that have been identified that can result in cancer cells forming. These are broken down into two groups – environmental and hereditary.

#### 1. Environmental

Identified environmental factors include certain chemicals, poor diet and lack of exercise, infection (particularly viral), radiation exposure (including sunlight), physical agents (e.g. asbestos), hormones and, rarely, physical trauma and inflammation.

#### 2. Hereditary

Certain cells have an inbuilt genetic mutation, which will cause them to become cancerous at a point in time. Identified genetic links include increased cancer risk in certain types of breast (BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes), bowel, thyroid, retinal, ovarian, melanoma and some other more rare tumour types.

## WHAT TREATMENT WILL I RECEIVE?

Different types of cancer require different forms of treatment, depending on factors such as the type and location of the cancer, the stage of the disease, and the individual's overall health.

Some of the most common types of cancer treatment include:

### Surveillance and monitoring

With certain early stage cancers, your doctor may elect to monitor you closely and watch the cancer to see if it will progress. Some cancers, e.g. prostate cancer, can grow very slowly so treatment might not be recommended, as treatment options may cause more harm than good.

### Surgery

For some tumours, the best form of treatment may be to cut out the abnormal cells such as melanoma and early-stage breast cancer so that any potential spread of the cancer is removed.

### Chemotherapy

Once the cancer is beyond a Stage 1, chemotherapy or radiotherapy may be used in conjunction with surgery to contain any spread of the cancer. Chemotherapy works by targeting abnormal cells, resulting in their death. Unfortunately, normal cells are also affected by the treatment, but do tend to regrow and repair rapidly. In some cases, the cancer cells can recur as well.

Hormone therapy can be used in conjunction with chemotherapy in certain cancers that respond to hormones, for example, with breast cancer.

### Radiotherapy

This involves targeting a radioactive beam at areas where cancer cells are thought to have spread. In most cases, this can be directed at the affected area, but as with chemotherapy, normal cells can be irradiated as well.

Brachytherapy is being used in early-stage prostate cancer by targeted radioactivity within the pelvic area.

### Biological therapies

Immunotherapy or biotherapy are new biological drugs used to target specific cancer cells and stimulate the body's immune system to fight them. While they may not work for every type of cancer or every patient, they have shown promise in treating certain cancers. Types of therapies include monoclonal antibodies, cytokine therapy, and cancer vaccines.

### Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies such as mind-body interventions and herbal treatments are being used in conjunction with conventional cancer treatments. If you are thinking of utilising an alternative therapy to treat your cancer, then in all cases, it is best to discuss this with your treating doctor.

### What side effects can I expect?

While undergoing cancer treatment, you may experience side effects such as fatigue, loss of appetite, hair loss and skin problems, among others. However, it's important to remember that the side effects you experience depend on the type of treatment and the area of the body being targeted, and some people experience little to no side effects at all.

In the event that you do experience side effects, your doctor can work with you to manage them effectively. Though you may need to take time off work and rest more often, you should prioritise self-care and give yourself time to heal. Remember that every treatment is unique and tailored to your individual needs, and you have a team of medical professionals to help you through the process.



## LOOKING AFTER YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

### EATING WELL

A healthy and balanced diet is important for people who have been diagnosed with cancer, as it can help them manage treatment and recovery more effectively. Eating well can provide numerous benefits, including:

- Improving quality of life by boosting energy levels, maintaining muscle strength, promoting a healthy weight, and enhancing mood
- Helping the body cope with the side effects of treatment, improving treatment effectiveness, reducing hospital stays, and speeding up recovery
- Promoting wound healing and tissue repair following surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and other treatments
- Enhancing the immune system and its ability to fight infections
- Reducing the risk of cancer recurrence.

Consider the following nutritional suggestions to manage common side effects of cancer treatment. It is important to inform your treating team before trying anything new and to follow a healthy balanced diet to meet your body's changing needs:

- For **constipation**, increase fibre intake, maintain hydration, and stay physically active. Inform your doctor if you have not had a bowel motion for more than three days.
- To manage **diarrhoea**, maintain hydration, start with small amounts of low-fibre foods, and avoid high-fibre, gas-forming, fried, fatty, or spicy foods, and alcohol.
- For **fatigue**, ensure adequate protein intake, and consider a multivitamin supplement if required.
- To **promote hair growth** following chemotherapy, consume omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins A and C, legumes, nuts, and good quality protein.
- To manage **nausea** and/or vomiting, eat smaller meals throughout the day, avoid unpleasant smells, use relaxation techniques, and maintain an upright position after eating.

## MOVING WELL

Exercise benefits most people during and after cancer treatment. As with improving your diet, exercise can help, but before starting a new exercise regime, it is best to discuss it with your treating doctor.

Following a health event, such as cancer, it is important to return to physical activity for the maintenance of general conditioning, improving your energy balance and for psychological wellbeing. There are different types of exercise that can be good for you while you are recovering, choose one that best suit your lifestyle.

### Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling, and swimming, is effective in improving cardiovascular health and overall body function. Regular aerobic activity helps maintain weight, boosts energy levels, and combats the symptoms of fatigue often associated with cancer treatment.

Moderate-intensity exercise should cause a slight sweat and noticeable increase in breathing and heart rate, and can include brisk walking at a comfortable pace where talking is possible but not singing.

### Resistance training

Resistance training, which can involve gym or home-based therabands or weight training, offers numerous benefits, such as improved cardiovascular health, increased muscle mass, tone, and metabolism. It may be a valuable addition to your weekly routine for building muscular strength during recovery and treatment.

### Mind-body exercise

Other types of exercise, such as yoga and pilates, can be beneficial for physical rehabilitation and should be considered. These exercises can increase flexibility, core strength, energy levels, mental clarity, relaxation and muscle tone.

*Important: Please consult your doctor prior to starting any exercise program. Supervised exercise is best, particularly for those who have had a recent health event. Please stop exercising immediately if you experience pain, dizziness, difficulty breathing or nausea, and consult your treating doctor.*

## SLEEPING WELL

Getting enough sleep is essential for all people, at any stage of life. But, it is especially crucial for people going through their cancer journey.

Benefits of sleep include helping to boost the immune system, reducing fatigue, improving mood, supporting physical and mental wellbeing, and enhancing memory and cognitive function. If sleep problems occur and/or persist, it is important to speak with your regular health care professional, who may be able to recommend certain strategies to help improve your daily sleep.





# LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

## THINKING WELL

**Connecting with others who have had similar experiences can provide valuable advice and coping strategies.**

Practicing mindfulness, which involves being present in the moment without judgment, can help manage stress and improve overall wellbeing. Incorporating mindfulness into daily routines through meditation, deep breathing, or simply being present can make a significant difference in quality of life during cancer treatment.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE.  
CANCER IS ONE OF  
THE MOST COMMON  
CONDITIONS  
IN AUSTRALIA.



# PERSONALISED CARE WHEN YOU NEED US MOST

**At OnePath, we care about your whole health and want to help you feel healthier.**

To provide additional support during your cancer journey, we have partnered with Valion Health to offer a virtual Cancer Support Program that is led by a team of oncology trained allied health professionals. This program offers a range of resources, support, and reassurance to help you through your treatment and recovery process. To find out more simply chat to your claims consultant or email [claims.rehabilitation@zurich.com.au](mailto:claims.rehabilitation@zurich.com.au).



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Cancer Council of Australia**

13 11 20  
[cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au)

**Cancer Australia**

[canceraustralia.gov.au](http://canceraustralia.gov.au)



### References

This booklet has been compiled using information from the following sources:

[cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au)  
[daa.asn.au](http://daa.asn.au)  
[valionhealth.com.au](http://valionhealth.com.au)

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