



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)
info@cancercares.org
www.cancercares.org

fact sheet

IF YOU'VE JUST BEEN DIAGNOSED

“You have cancer.” Hearing these words from a doctor can be devastating, but many people who receive a cancer diagnosis come to learn that there are effective treatment options. There are also many ways to manage side effects and cope with the concerns raised by cancer. CancerCare helps individuals at any stage of cancer, and many of our clients tell us that we were instrumental in helping them figure out the first steps in their journey at a time when they were least focused and most overwhelmed.

WHEN YOU OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE RECEIVES A CANCER DIAGNOSIS, CANCERCARE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING COURSE OF ACTION

Form a good health care team. The doctor who diagnosed your cancer will be one of many professionals who become part of your team. Medical oncologists, nurses, social workers and psychologists, as well as nurses' aides, home care professionals, nutritionists and the clergy, can all play significant and unique roles in your healing process. Your family and friends are a crucial part of your health care team.

Understand the roles played by each member of your health care team. Your oncologist is the member of your team that organizes your treatment plan. He or she may work with an oncology nurse who helps you manage treatment side effects, gives more information about the treatment you will be receiving and schedules your next diagnostic procedure.

Understand what your insurance will and will not cover. Only when faced with a medical crisis do many people learn how their HMO, other health coverage or entitlements work, what services are covered and what reimbursement procedures to follow. To anticipate any problems, use the toll-free number provided by your health insurance carrier. Find out whom you should call in your doctor's office or hospital when your insurance company has a question about a procedure or specific charge for medications or tests.



Be an advocate. You must remember that as a cancer patient, you are a consumer of services and are entitled to the best care possible. Ask questions about the care you are getting and who is providing it. Make lists of questions before speaking with your medical team. Write down their answers and read back what you wrote to check for accuracy. Tape record the sessions so you will not forget any of the information. Seek second opinions so that you feel well-informed and confident about your decisions.

Most importantly, take care of yourself. Though you may have others around you who are supportive, you must make sure that you take the best possible care of yourself. The better you care for yourself, the better able you will be to cope with your diagnosis. Consider joining a CancerCare support group for people with cancer or a program near to your home or treating hospital. Keeping a journal, expressing feelings and thoughts artistically, getting appropriate exercise and joining a yoga or Tai Chi class are examples of activities other people diagnosed with cancer have found helpful.

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CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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CARING FOR YOUR PET AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS

Addressing the daily need of a pet during cancer treatment can be difficult. It's important to protect yourself from any potential infections and to ask for help with practical concerns, especially if you're feeling fatigued. Consider the following:

- Talk to your health care team about how you can best minimize infections and if there are local resources that can help.
- Wash your hands after interacting with your pet.
- Ask family or friends for help with practical concerns like taking your pet to the vet, walking your pet or buying pet food.
- Make sure your pet is up-to-date on its vaccinations.
- If you're cleaning up after your pet (like a litter box), wear gloves to protect your skin.
- Make a plan to coordinate care in case you are hospitalized or has extended time away from home.

*Edited by Victoria Puzo, MSW, LCSW
This activity is supported by AbbVie.*



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National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

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