

After Treatment: Recurrence

Information Sheet



What is recurrence?

Recurrence is when a cancer comes back or happens again, usually after not being found for some time.

The cancer may return to the same place where it started before. The cancer may also return to another part of the body.

Recurrence is also called recurrent cancer.

Why does recurrence happen?

Recurrence happens when some of the cancer cells still remain, even after treatment. These leftover cancer cells may have been too small to be detected or seen during your follow-up care.

Scientists do not know why recurrence happens in some people and not others.

Where does recurrence happen?

The cancer can come back to the same place it was before.

The same type of cancer can also come back to a different part of the body. When cancer spreads to a different part of the body it **metastasizes**.

How will recurrence be different than the first time?

You may feel a lot of different emotions when you are told your cancer has come back. Because you had cancer before, you have:

- **Knowledge:** You know a lot about cancer and cancer treatment. You have a better understanding of cancer.
- **Experience:** Your journey through cancer has taught you a lot. You know what to expect and what to hope for. You learned how to help control side effects and how to cope with cancer.

Since the last time you had cancer and cancer treatment, it is possible that there are new and improved treatments available.



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Is cancer treatment more difficult the second time around?

Everyone reacts to cancer and cancer treatment differently. Some people say that recurrent cancer treatment is more demanding and emotional than the first time. Remember, there are people who will support you during this time.

- Family and friends
- Doctors and nurses
- Health psychologist
- Oncology social workers
- Leaders in your faith or spiritual community

Talk to your health care provider about getting the support you need.



What are important things to remember about going through cancer a second time?

- You didn't fail treatment and you didn't do anything wrong.
- Cancer can be stressful. Do things that make you feel calm and relaxed.
- Cancer can be tiring. Focus on things that are worth your time and energy.
- Set small goals for the day such as exercising, reading a chapter in a book or having lunch with a friend.
- Be open with loved ones. Tell them what they can do to comfort you.
- Many people reflect on their journey with cancer and try to find meaning.

Where can I get more information?

The National Cancer Institute provides accurate and up-to-date information about clinical trials, cancer types, prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end of life care.

Phone: 1-800-4CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

Website: www.cancer.gov

The American Society of Clinical Oncologists provides patient information for those living with cancer and for caregivers for those with cancer.

Phone: 888-651-3038

Website: www.cancer.net



Carbone Cancer Center
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



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**Cancer Health
Disparities Initiative**

For more local information, please contact:

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