

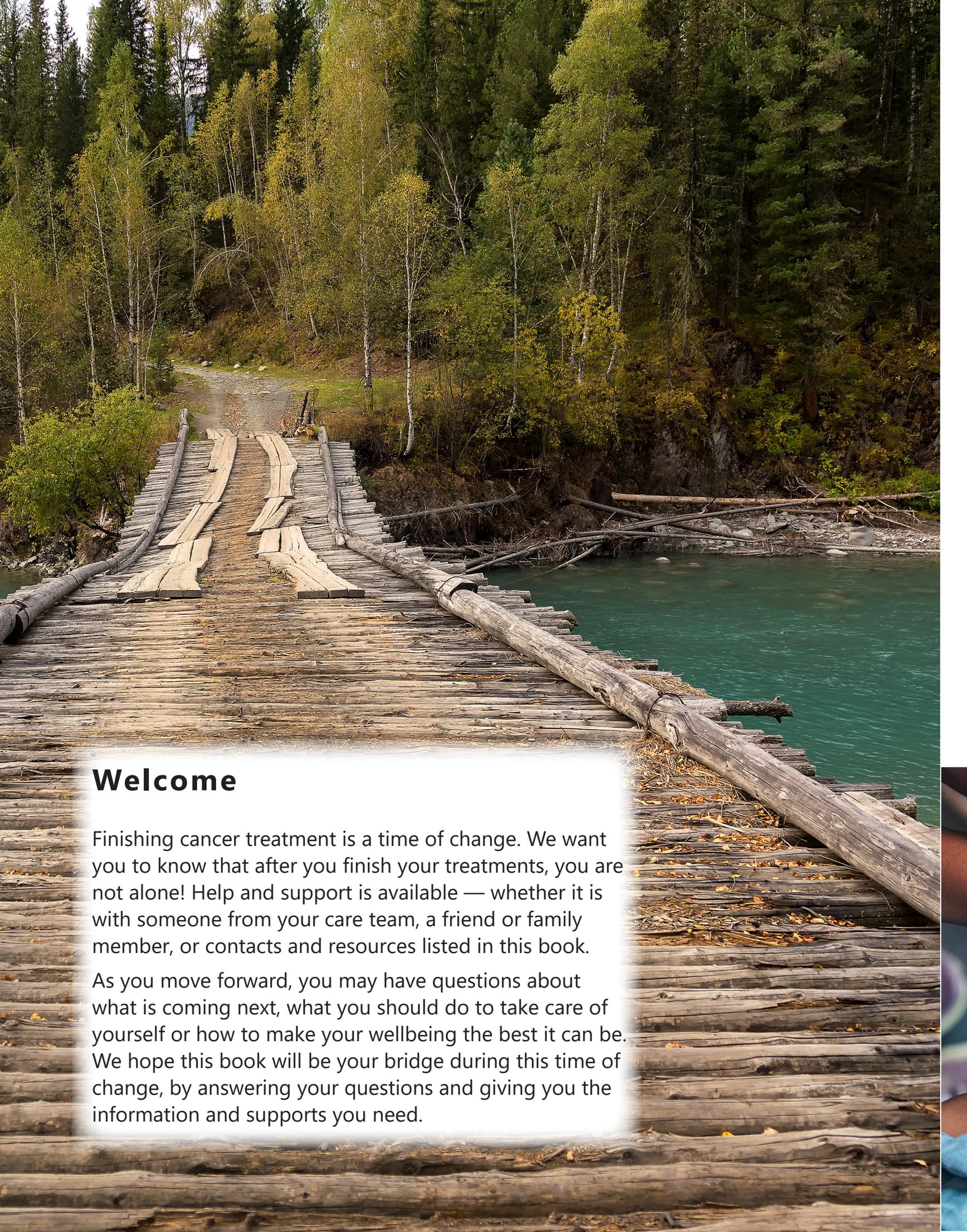
# After Treatment:

## Information and Resources to Help You Set Priorities and Take Action

Living Your Best Life With and Beyond Cancer



General Information



## Welcome

Finishing cancer treatment is a time of change. We want you to know that after you finish your treatments, you are not alone! Help and support is available — whether it is with someone from your care team, a friend or family member, or contacts and resources listed in this book.

As you move forward, you may have questions about what is coming next, what you should do to take care of yourself or how to make your wellbeing the best it can be. We hope this book will be your bridge during this time of change, by answering your questions and giving you the information and supports you need.

This book is about helping you live your best as you finish treatment and afterwards. Since everyone is unique, not everything will be important to you. Focus on 1 or 2 things that will benefit you most. Often, taking action in one area will help you in another. Move on to other things when you have made progress or feel ready.

### Using this book:

- ◆ The book is divided into 3 sections: **Manage Your Healthcare**, **Improve Your Wellbeing**, and **Take Action**.
- ◆ The Menu of Options (pages [iii and iv](#)) is a "snapshot" of things to help you monitor your health and live your best after cancer treatment.
- ◆ Read this book in any order you choose! Skip to a section that interests you or go through the book from start to finish.
- ◆ Add notes in the book to make it your own.
- ◆ Get answers to common questions, find other sources of information and support or take action to manage a health concern or improve your wellbeing.
- ◆ Take it one step at a time and ask for help when you need it.
- ◆ Helpful symbols to know:

 or  – suggest actions you may want to try

 Phone

 Web – shows a web page link to an online resource

»  Arrow with magnifying glass – shows a keyword or phrase to use when searching a website



*Great things  
are brought  
about and  
burdens are  
lightened  
through the  
efforts of  
many hands*

~ M. Russell Ballard

## Manage Your Healthcare

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## Manage Your Healthcare

**A. Engage in follow-up care activities**

**B. Support recovery and manage concerns**

**C. Manage medications effectively**

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- Fatigue
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- Sleep
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- Skin
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## Set Priorities and Take Action

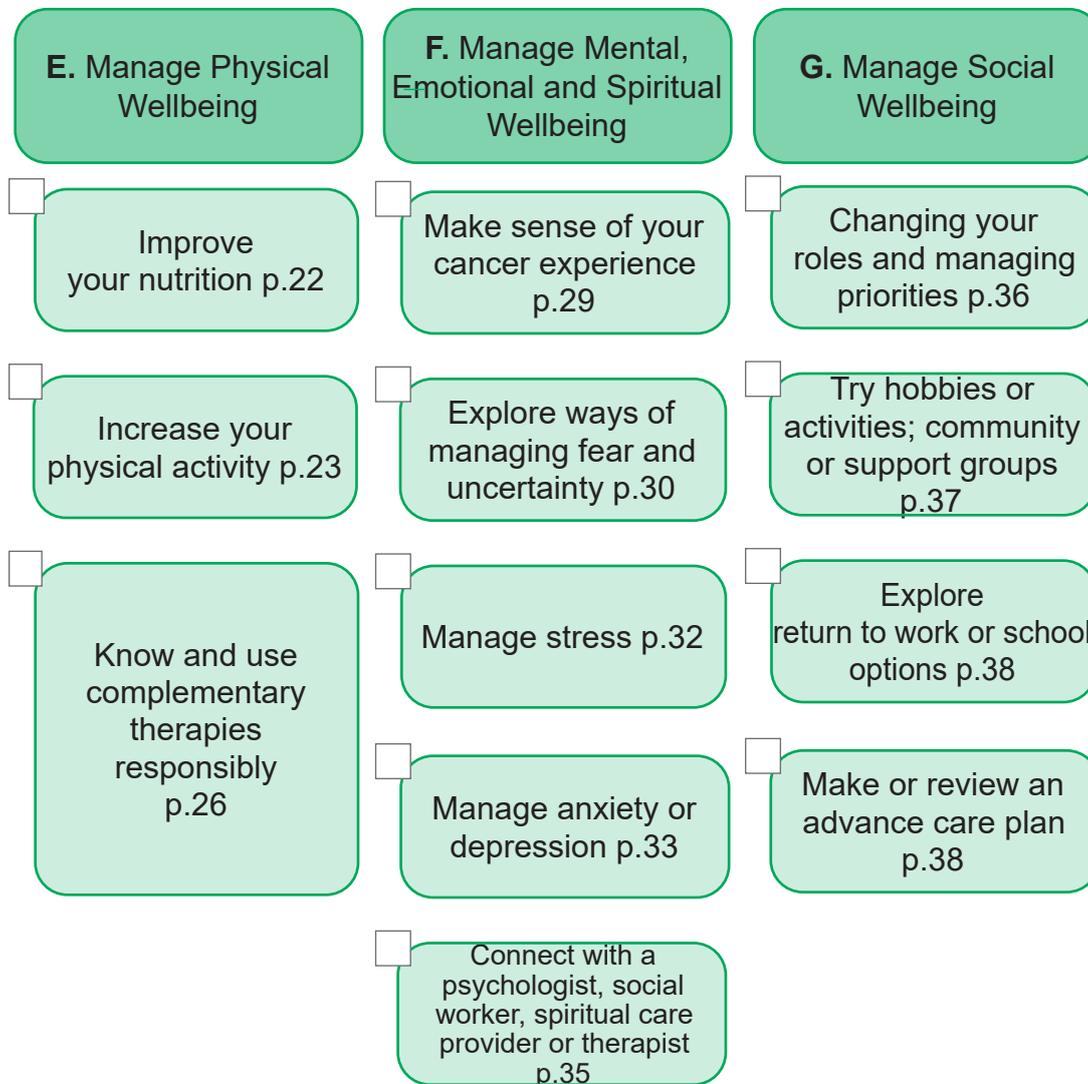
Completing cancer treatment can be difficult when you are not sure what to do next. But, there are many things that you can do! Taking action to improve your health or wellbeing can help.

When you are ready, this menu and the information in this book, can help you move forward, one step at a time.

One thing at a time,  
one step at a time,  
adding up over time.

## Improve Your Well-Being

Your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing are all related and affect one another. Taking action to maintain or improve even one of these areas may have positive effects on the other areas. For example, being more active can help you feel less stressed.



## Set Priorities and Take Action





## Manage Your Healthcare

This section includes information on who you will see for appointments, what to expect and how to manage common concerns. Suggestions for managing your medications and risk factors are also included.

### Living Your Best Life With and Beyond Cancer: Video Series

[myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/cancer-lybl](http://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/cancer-lybl)

- Scroll the page to see which videos interest you
- Print or download the guide on the website to help plan things you would like to try

## A Engage in Follow-Up Care Activities

### A1. Know your follow-up routine

#### Who will I see for follow-up care?

After you finish your treatment at the cancer centre, your oncologist or cancer care team will talk to you about your follow-up care. The team uses the best evidence available to decide what kinds of tests you need, how often the tests should be done and who should order them. You will receive the right care for you.

Some people will continue to be seen at the cancer centre on a regular basis. This is called **Shared Care**. Others are seen by their primary healthcare provider or family doctor. This is called **Primary Care**. You will be well taken care of, no matter which type of follow-up care you have.

Your cancer care team will give you more specific information. Sometimes, this will be in a letter. Use the information, along with this book, to manage your follow-up care. If you do not have a letter, write any extra information into this book.



Check off which model of care you will have, to help you remember:

- Shared Care:** your cancer care team books your tests and follow-up appointments for cancer at the Cancer Centre.
  - you see your primary healthcare provider for all other health concerns
  
- Primary Care:** your cancer care team **transfers** your care to a primary healthcare provider, such as your family doctor or nurse practitioner. The primary care provider will:
  - arrange tests and follow-up appointments for routine cancer to check for cancer (sometimes called "surveillance")
  - continue to see you for any health conditions you have or any new problems
  - refer you back to a specialist or your oncologist if they have any concerns

## What tests do I need after I finish cancer treatment?

Depending on the type of cancer you had, and your treatments, you **may** have the following tests and exams as part of your follow-up:



### Physical Exam

This will include a close examination of some parts of your body and lymph nodes.



Regular immunizations are a part of managing your health. Talk to your healthcare team about which immunizations are best for you.



### Bloodwork and Other Tests

Your oncologist might request blood work (including “tumour markers”).



### Imaging Tests

Imaging tests can be done at different points in time, and can include:

- X-rays
- CT Scan (“cat” scan; computerized axial tomography scan)
- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)
- Ultrasound
- Mammography (breast imaging)
- PET (positron emission tomography)

## A2. Connect with your primary healthcare provider

Make an appointment with your primary healthcare provider when your treatment is finished. If your care model is:

- **Shared Care:** continue to see your primary healthcare provider for any health conditions (such as diabetes or blood pressure) or new problems (such as colds and flus) unrelated to your cancer treatment.
- **Primary Care:** make an appointment to review your follow-up schedule with your primary healthcare provider. If you have a letter, take it with you. You may want to show them this book as well.



### Need help finding a family doctor?

 811 (Health Link)

 [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) »  find a doctor

### A3. Book and attend appointments

Make sure you attend your follow-up appointments and get the testing or screening you need.

#### What can I do to remember my medical appointments?

try  
these

- Book annual appointments (physicals, eye exams, mammograms) around yearly events like birthdays or anniversaries.
- Mark your calendar to schedule long-range appointments, if you cannot book right away. If you are seeing a specialist, enter the reminder information on your calendar 2-3 months before you need to see them. You will be able to book in advance and keep your appointment at the right time.
- Ask the clinic to write the date and time of your next appointment on a business card. If you must change the appointment, you'll have the phone number handy.
- Ask your primary healthcare provider or doctor's office to send you a reminder letter or call you before your appointment.

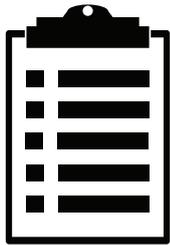




## A4. Know the signs and symptoms of recurrence or secondary cancer

Many people wonder what they can do to stop the cancer from coming back. A big concern for many people finishing cancer treatment is the worry that the cancer may return in the same part of the body (**recurrence**) or it may develop in another part of the body (**secondary cancer**). Each cancer has its own set of symptoms to watch for. But, there are some basic guidelines. Your oncologist and primary healthcare provider may give you more information on what to watch for and when to call.

See your primary healthcare provider as soon as possible if you notice:

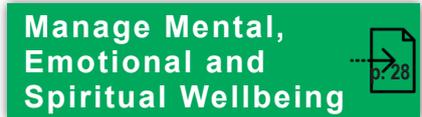


- Swelling or a new lump
- Unplanned weight loss or weight gain
- A new cough that does not get better
- Yellowing of your skin or eyes
- Night sweats
- A new feeling of significant fatigue or a tired feeling that will not go away
- Pain in your bones
- A headache that will not go away

If the symptoms are constant, keep happening, or start to get worse, tell your healthcare team. It is important to know that you will still have normal issues like colds, flus, and everyday aches and pains.

Learn about managing risk factors to help prevent cancer.

If you need help managing your worry consider trying some different things or getting professional help.



**My notes:**




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**B**

## Support Recovery and Manage Concerns

You may (or may not) have some concerns or side effects after treatment for cancer. It may take time for you to recover. While some concerns may improve on their own over time, you may need to work with your healthcare team to try different strategies, medications, or therapies for other things. Everyone's experience is different.

**Talk to your primary healthcare provider if you have concerns or are worried about your symptoms or side effects.**



### B1. Know possible side effects and what to do if they happen

It's important to know what to watch for and how to manage any side effects that may be related to your treatment. Talk with your healthcare team and refer to your letter (if you have one) to find out more. Read the next section for tips and advice on how to manage **common** side effects.

 [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) »  late and long-term effects of treatment

 [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net) »  long term side effects

Sometimes, side effects can happen months to years after treatment ends. These side effects are known as **late** or **long-term** effects of treatment. Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about any late side effects.





## B2. Manage common concerns



### Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common side effects after treatment. It can take a long time to regain your energy. It is not a sign of laziness and it is not the same “normal” tiredness.

Fatigue may make you feel:

- worn out, tired or sleepy, no energy
- cannot concentrate or think
- lack of interest in doing anything with friends or family
- no interest in sex or being intimate with your partner
- depressed, disconnected or uninterested in anything
- short of breath



### Watch Living Well With Cancer-Related Fatigue

video series or read the booklet (see link in table below)

try these

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Prioritize your schedule</b> </p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pace yourself and take rest periods when you need it.</li> <li>• Schedule your activities by how you feel — you may not be able to do everything on your list. Figure out what is most important for you and ask for help from others to complete the rest.</li> <li>• Accept help from others when they offer or ask for help when you need it.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Be active</b> </p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of research shows that being active can really help!</li> <li>• If you are not used to exercising, try the 3 Minute Movement Videos which show simple exercises you can do while sitting in a chair.</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca">www.myhealth.alberta.ca</a> »  3 minute movement</p>   |
| <p><b>Eat healthy</b> </p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat smaller, more frequent meals and snacks.</li> <li>• Eat a balanced diet, with protein rich foods.</li> <li>• Ask to speak to a registered dietitian to learn how nutrition can help manage your fatigue.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Get more information</b> </p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch the video series on Living Well With Cancer-Related Fatigue</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca">www.myhealth.alberta.ca</a> »  cancer fatigue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the booklets (ask your healthcare team or view from the video web page):             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Cancer and Fatigue</li> <li>◊ Making the Most of Your Time and Energy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Manage your sleep</b> </p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See the suggestions in the section on Sleep Problems (p. 7).</li> </ul>  |



**Christine's Tip:**

"I booked appointments with myself to go for walks. This really helped, especially when I was exhausted and knew it was the only thing that would help get my energy back. I could not break a date with myself!"



## Sleep Problems

Sleep problems can be related to fatigue but also can be from stress, change in activity levels, altered sleep patterns, or menopause. There are things you can do to help you sleep better. If you have concerns about your sleep, talk to your healthcare provider.



try these

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Be active</b> </p>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get regular physical activity but not during the 3 to 4 hours before your bedtime. Walking, swimming, and yoga may be some good choices.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Change what you eat or drink</b> </p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid caffeine after noon (such as coffee, tea, cola drinks, and chocolate).</li> <li>• Avoid drinking alcohol. Alcohol can make you sleepy but can also wake you up.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Relax at the end of the day</b> </p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure you wind down and relax towards the end of the day. Avoid problem-solving conversations or challenging activities in the evening.</li> <li>• Try having a bath before bed to help you relax.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Make a sleep routine</b> </p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set a bedtime and a wake up time, and keep those times, even on weekends. This will help your body get used to a regular sleep time.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Make your bedroom a restful place</b> </p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove distractions such as a clock, telephone, television, or radio from your bedroom.</li> <li>• Block out background noise in your bedroom: use a fan, a white noise machine, or earplugs.</li> <li>• Keep your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet.</li> <li>• Reserve the bedroom for sleeping and sexual activities.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>After you are in bed</b> </p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After getting into bed, try to let your muscles relax. Imagine yourself in a peaceful, pleasant place.</li> <li>• If you are still awake after 15 or 20 minutes, get up and read or do a boring task until you feel drowsy. Do not lie in bed and think about how much sleep you're missing. Do not watch TV in bed.</li> </ul> |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>If you take medicines</b> </p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review all of your prescription and non-prescription medicines with your primary healthcare provider or pharmacist to see if your medicines could be causing your sleep problem.</li> <li>• If you take steroids (such as prednisone) or other medicines that may be stimulating, talk to your doctor about the possibility of taking them in the morning.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Try complementary therapies</b> </p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is evidence that therapeutic massage improves sleep for people who are having cancer treatments.</li> <li>• Mind-body therapy, such as meditation, relaxation, and cognitive-behavioural therapy can be helpful for sleep.</li> <li>• Movement-based mind-body therapy, such as yoga and tai chi, have been found to improve sleep.</li> </ul>                  |



### Brain Fog

**Cancer-related brain fog** is the name for the forgetfulness and memory problems common after cancer treatment, especially after chemotherapy. This can include issues with:

- remembering
- concentrating
- word finding
- organization
- multi-tasking

The cause is unclear, but it may be a result of treatment, hormone changes, depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleep issues, or any combination of these.



|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Talk with a professional</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupational therapy or counselling with a psychologist or social worker can help. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral or see pages 15 and 35 for phone numbers.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Reduce stress</b> </p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tips  <a href="http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca">www.myhealth.alberta.ca</a> »  stress management</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Use memory helpers</b> </p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try focusing on one thing at a time.</li> <li>• Use memory aids like writing lists or setting alarms.</li> <li>• Put things back in the same spot you always do, for example keep car keys in a dish by the door.</li> <li>• Keep a calendar for appointments and important events.</li> <li>• Try puzzles and games to train memory and attention skills. The brain can develop new connections.</li> <li>• Complete a task before you start another one.</li> </ul> |



## Hair Regrowth

- In most cases, your hair should start to grow back about 4 to 6 weeks after your last chemotherapy treatment. Hair will start growing slowly at first.
- Hair may become:
  - ◆ finer or coarser in texture
  - ◆ darker or lighter in colour
  - ◆ curly or straight
- Is usually very fine and soft in texture at first. You may want to wait 6 months after the end of chemotherapy before you colour your hair, since it may not tolerate dye well.
- Most people can expect about 1/2 inch of growth each month. Your hair may take up to 1 or 2 years to grow back completely.
- Eye brows and lashes tend to grow slower than the hair on your head. Some women find their face becomes fuzzy and choose to remove the hair by waxing or sugaring.



## Fingernails and Toenails

Some chemotherapy treatment can cause your fingernails and toenails to change. They can:

- Become brittle
- Become loose and fall off
- Become discoloured
- Have lines or bumpy ridges

This is not permanent and your nails will re-grow. Keep your nails trimmed and clean. Watch for signs of infections such as redness, swelling, pain, discharge, and a bad smell. See your family doctor if you notice signs of infection. It's okay to use nail polish and paint your nails.



## Menopausal Hot Flashes

Chemotherapy, endocrine therapy, surgical removal of ovaries, chemical disruption of ovaries, radiation to the pelvic area or stopping hormone replacement therapy can all lead to a sudden drop of female hormones which cause symptoms of menopause.

These tips may help with hot flashes:

- Lifestyle: regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and smoking cessation.
- Layer your clothing so you can adjust throughout the day.
- Keep an electric or hand held fan with you.
- Hormone replacement therapy may help manage hot flashes. Talk to your doctor to find out if this is a good option for you.
- Non-hormonal medications – after careful consideration and counselling, you and your healthcare provider may choose to try medications to decrease hot flashes.

## Lymphedema

### What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a medical condition that needs to be diagnosed by your doctor. It is excessive swelling of a body part due to the buildup of lymph fluid. This buildup can happen when the lymphatic system or nodes are:

- Inflamed
- Removed during surgery
- Damaged from radiation
- Blocked

Lymphedema can range from mild swelling that comes and goes, to a significant persistent swelling. It is often a lifelong condition where you need to do long-term self-management.

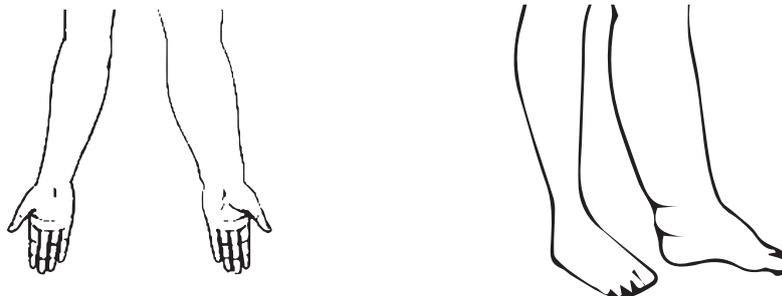
Physiotherapy or occupational therapy can help. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral to Rehabilitation Oncology (see [page 15](#)).



### What are the signs and symptoms of lymphedema?

- Swelling in the affected area
- A feeling of heaviness, tingling or numbness in the affected area
- Clothing or jewellery becomes tight on that limb
- Find it more difficult to move the affected limb
- Have pain or discomfort in the affected area
- Have infections that reoccur

Have your doctor assess any changes in size, colour, temperature, skin condition, and sensation, and get a referral to a certified lymphedema therapist for treatment. Check with your local cancer centre to see if they have a certified lymphedema therapist.



### Infections (cellulitis)

Infections can be an urgent medical situation. Signs may include redness, warmth, pain, chills/fever and a feeling of overall illness or flu-like symptoms. See your family doctor if you notice any of these signs or symptoms.



## How can I reduce my risk of developing lymphedema?

We do not know why some people with the same risk factors develop lymphedema and others do not. Here are some things you can try to prevent lymphedema:



- Minimize injury to the affected limb.
- Maintain good skin and nail care – to help reduce the risk of developing infection.
- Clean small breaks or cuts in the skin with soap and water and apply antibiotic cream. Have your family doctor look at any serious cuts.
- If possible, use your non-surgical arm for any injections, IVs, automated blood pressure readings or blood draws.
- Do not wear tight-fitting jewellery or clothing on the affected limb.

Some considerations for your activity level and lifestyle:

- Keep active. Talk to your family doctor before you start any exercise program.
- Stay at a healthy body weight with a well-balanced diet and exercise.
- Swimming, walking, biking, and light yoga are all good activities. Avoid temperature extremes (for example, **hot yoga is not recommended**).
- Gradually build up the length of time and intensity of your exercise.
- Take frequent rest periods during activity.

Learn about lymphedema in the **Understanding Cancer-Related Lymphedema** module at [www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare) > **Rehabilitation Oncology** > Lymphedema/Swelling or scan the QR code.



Find more information about ways you can increase your physical activity safely.



### Skin

Radiation and some chemotherapy treatments can make your skin red, dry and itchy. This should be temporary. The skin reaction after radiation will likely be the worst 10-14 days after your treatment is complete. At this point, your skin will start to heal. Be sure to wash gently and keep your skin covered in the sun. Use a water-based cream (such as Glaxal®) and wear loose clothing. Your oncologist may prescribe a medicated cream as well. Later on, your skin color could change (become darker or more red) in the area where you had treatment (a condition called "telangiectasias"). It is important to know this is a normal, long-term effect for some people, but may not always happen. If you have questions, talk with your follow-up team.



### Nerve Changes (Peripheral Neuropathy)

Some chemotherapy treatments (taxanes in particular), can cause nerve damage in the fingers, hands, toes and feet, called **peripheral neuropathy**. Your hands or feet may feel numb, painful, or weak. This usually gets better with time, but sometimes patients have ongoing issues. There may be treatment options available. Talk with your follow-up team.



## Pain

**I have a new pain or a funny sensation that started after surgery or treatment. What is this and will it improve?**

Pain can be common and can happen right away or later on. It is different for everyone. The type and location of pain symptoms help identify what part of the body is causing pain. If you can tell your healthcare team how it feels, it will help us figure out how to treat it quicker.

**Bone pain** — a deep throbbing pain that can be sharp at times. It may get worse when you move around.

**Visceral pain** — might feel like a dull, deep squeezing pain. It is caused from damage to the organs inside your body. It can be hard to tell exactly where the pain is coming from.

**Neuropathic pain** — may feel like a burning, shooting, piercing, stabbing or an electric current. It might feel like pins and needles or tingling. It is caused from damage to your nerves. It can hurt when things like clothing, water or wind touch your skin.



Pain usually improves over time but for some people, pain may never go away. If you are worried about it, or if you have pain that is not being managed well, talk to your healthcare team so they can help you.

try these

**Use medications as needed and prescribed** 

- Keep track of when you take your pain medications — this will help to see if the dose is the right amount for you or if it needs to change.
- There may be other treatments or supplements to help you but it is important to speak with your healthcare team before you try them.
- Take your medications as prescribed. Sometimes it may take more than 1 type of medication to help decrease and control your pain.

**Find support** 

- It is normal to feel upset and frustrated when you are in pain. You can find support in your community, family and friends and through your healthcare team.

**Try activities** 

- Relaxing activities and managing stress may help to control your pain.
- Being active and exercising can help with pain.



## Fertility

Fertility is the ability to get someone pregnant or to get pregnant and carry a child to a healthy birth.

### ? Will cancer impact my ability to have children?

Cancer and cancer treatment can sometimes damage the reproductive organs such as the ovaries and testicles. These changes can have long-term or short-term effects on your fertility. Reproductive organ changes can include:

- Decreased sperm quality, number, and motility
- Irregular periods, or it might stop females from having periods
- Early menopause

Not all cancer treatments affect fertility and those that do can affect fertility at different levels. Tests are needed to confirm fertility.



Talk to your doctor or visit:

 [www.ahs.ca/cancertreatment](http://www.ahs.ca/cancertreatment) » Managing Side Effects » Sexual Health

### ? When can I try to get pregnant?

It's usually recommended to wait 1 to 2 years after treatment is done before you try to get pregnant. Everyone is different and how long you need to wait depends on the type and stage of cancer and the treatment you get.



Ask your doctor when it is ok for you to try getting pregnant.



## Sexuality and Intimacy

Concerns about sexuality are common after cancer treatment.

### I have no desire to be sexually active anymore — is this normal and when will it get better?

There are many reasons why sexual desire goes away both during or after cancer treatment. Anyone with an illness will often find they are less interested in sex. Desire (libido) is often one of the first things to disappear, and one of the last things to return after treatment. It is very common and normal and it may get better on its own.

### How can I get my interest in intimacy and sexuality back?

Sometimes people feel less “connected” to their body, or lose their “sense of sexuality” after going through many examinations and cancer treatments. You may feel less attractive and less sensitive to arousal. Partners may worry about hurting you during sexual activities.

**try these**

**Consider sexual activities as valuable.** Sometimes making a conscious decision, even if you do not feel desire, can help you engage in sexual activities you may enjoy. It can help you feel close and connected to your partner, or give them pleasure and may help release stress.

**Allow enough time to become aroused.** Start with activities like kissing, cuddling, and gentle touch with hands. If painful intercourse is a concern, lubricants and moisturizers may help. Make sure you communicate your needs and concerns to your partner.



## Where can I get help?

### Sexual Health Booklet Series

 Pick them up at your cancer centre.

 [www.ahs.ca/cancertreatment](http://www.ahs.ca/cancertreatment)

- » Managing Side Effects
- » Sexual Health

### Oncology and Sexuality, Intimacy & Survivorship (OASIS) Program

 **Calgary**  
Tom Baker Cancer Centre  
403-355-3246

 **Edmonton**  
Cross Cancer Institute  
780-432-8260

### The Canadian Cancer Society

 [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)  
»  sexuality or fertility

### Your Primary Care Provider

 Family Doctor or Nurse





### B3. Manage stress, anxiety or depression

After cancer treatment is over, difficult feelings such as fear or depression may develop or get stronger. This is normal for many people. You may need help to deal with these feelings.

Professional help is available ...   p. 35

For other strategies ...   p. 32  
 p. 33



### B4. Consider rehabilitation activities

Cancer and cancer treatments can cause changes to your body. Rehabilitation (rehab) specialists work with you to help you:

- restore or adapt to physical changes
- be as physically independent as possible
- regain your ability to perform daily activities
- provide relief and control of symptoms

**Rehab has many benefits. It can:**

- improve movement, strength and balance changed by treatment
- improve scar mobility
- decrease pain
- increase energy
- help with changes in sensation
- manage lymphedema (swelling of an arm, leg, trunk, face or neck, usually from surgery or radiation)
- help with speech or swallowing changed by treatment
- help with daily living skills and activities

Rehab specialists include:

- physical therapists
- occupational therapists
- therapy assistants
- speech language pathologists (speech and swallowing)

 If you believe rehab would help you, ask your doctor for a referral or call and speak with one of our specialists at the centre nearest you. Visit:

 [www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare) » **Rehabilitation Oncology** for links to the various cancer centres or view the brochure.



### Rehabilitation Classes

**Cancer Care Alberta Classes, Groups, and Events**

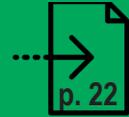
 [www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses](http://www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses)

## B5. Improve wellbeing

Wellbeing is how comfortable, happy or healthy you feel. Your wellbeing is affected by many things. You can take actions to improve your wellbeing which can help support your recovery and help you better manage, or reduce, your symptoms. For example, research shows that being more active or exercising regularly can help reduce fatigue (tiredness).

The second part of this book has activities to help you improve your physical, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing. Have a look!

**Improve Your Wellbeing**



## C

## Manage Medications Effectively

### C1. Know and understand your medications

It's important to know and understand all the medications and herbal supplements you are taking. You should know:

- why you are taking the medicine
- what it is used for
- how long you will be taking it (for example, antibiotics may be used for a short amount of time, while you might take a blood pressure medication for a long time)
- what foods or other medications to avoid while taking it (if any)

If you are not sure, it might be time to review the medications you are on. Talk with your primary healthcare provider or ask a pharmacist to review them with you.



### C2. Keep a list and review it regularly

It is important to make sure your medication list is complete, accurate, and up-to-date. We call this process **Medication Reconciliation** or **MedRec**. Making sure you are taking the right medications when you enter our care, move between services and go home, is a priority for your healthcare team. You are a key member of that team. We need to know everything about your medications and how you take them, to help keep you safe.



- Make sure you have an up-to-date list of all your medications (including any herbal or “natural” supplements).
- Keep your medication list somewhere you can find it to take to appointments or if you need to go to the hospital (on the fridge, in your purse).
- Review the list regularly to make sure you know what you are taking.
- Review the list with your primary healthcare provider at every medical appointment to make sure you are still taking the medications you need.
- For tools, tips, resources, videos and tracking worksheets:

 [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca) »  medication list

### C3. Know and take action on medication side effects

When you start a medication, you should get a teaching sheet with information on what side effects could happen while taking that medicine and what you should do about them. If you are not sure, ask your pharmacist for this information.



## D

## Manage Risk Factors

Sometimes people worry about getting a different kind of cancer. While some things in life are not within our control, there are some things you can do to help you live as well as possible—healthy lifestyle behaviours may improve physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health, and are things we can control.

A few strategies are listed below. For more strategies and information visit

 [www.healthiestogether.ca/living-healthy/overview/](http://www.healthiertogether.ca/living-healthy/overview/)

### D1. Know your genetic risk factors



Most kinds of cancer are not hereditary or genetic (not something passed on from parents to children). While it is rare, sometimes a few family members do have the same kind of cancer—this may be because of a shared environment or a genetic factor. To see if you or your family should have genetic testing, talk to your primary healthcare provider.

### D2. Get screened for other cancers

You should get regular screening for other cancers based on your age and sex, in addition to your recommended cancer follow-up. Talk to your primary healthcare provider about screening for cancers. Visit Screening for Life to find out more.  [screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca)





### D3. Reduce exposure to sun or ultraviolet light

Cancer treatment can make your skin more sensitive. Decrease your risk of skin cancer by avoiding indoor tanning salons and too much sun exposure. If you do go outside in direct sun for long periods:

|  |  |
|--|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use sunscreen on exposed skin, with at least 30 SPF. Check sunscreen bottles for a best before date – old sunscreen will not protect you from sun damage</li> <li>• Re-apply sunscreen at least every 2 hours and after swimming or sweating</li> <li>• Use sunscreen if you are outdoors on a sunny day in winter</li> </ul> |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover yourself with clothing, wear a hat and sunglasses</li> </ul>  |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek shade especially between 10am and 3pm</li> </ul>   |



For information on the health risks of indoor tanning:

 [www.healthiestogether.ca/living-healthy/limit-uv-rays/indoor-tanning/](http://www.healthiertogether.ca/living-healthy/limit-uv-rays/indoor-tanning/)

For employers and employees who work outdoors:

 [besunsible.ca](http://besunsible.ca)

### D4. Manage your weight

A key to good health is to maintain a healthy body weight. Carrying extra weight increases the risk of many diseases including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, hypertension, arthritis, and dementia.



#### Make a plan to get to or maintain a healthy body weight

- Make gradual, simple changes in the way you eat
  -  [healthyeatingstartshere.ca](http://healthyeatingstartshere.ca)
- Increase your level of physical activity
- Make an appointment with a registered dietitian:
  -  [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca) »  adult weight management
  -  [ahs.ca](http://ahs.ca) »  adult weight management

## D5. Quit tobacco use

Smoking has been shown to:

- Increase the risk of cancer recurrence
- Increase the risk of developing a second different cancer by 30%
- Cause an increased health risk due to heart problems, breathing problems or both



Help is available:



### Alberta Quits

Operated by experts, Alberta Quits gives:

- Support from trained cessation counsellors
- Access, day and night, to community chat forums
- Information on medications to help you quit
- Fact sheets on various tobacco-related topics
- E-quit tips and motivational text messages

Personalize your online dashboard and build your own plan to quit. It's free to use, and research shows that getting help makes you twice as likely to be successful at quitting.

 1-866-710-7848  [www.albertaquits.ca](http://www.albertaquits.ca)  [www.healthiertogether.ca](http://www.healthiertogether.ca)

### Primary Healthcare Provider

Your primary healthcare provider or family doctor may be a member of a Primary Care Network (PCN) and may have access to a Smoking Cessation program for you (usually free).





## D6. Reduce or quit alcohol use

Drinking alcohol increases your chances of getting certain types of cancers. Consider limiting your alcohol intake. The Canadian Cancer Society recommends no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 per day for women.

1 standard drink might be smaller than you realize:

Beer - 360 mL (12 fl. oz) of regular beer (5% alcohol)

Spirits - 45 mL (1.5 fl. oz) of spirits (40% alcohol)

Wine - 150 mL (5 fl. oz) of wine (12% alcohol)

**Tip!**

**Follow these tips from the Canadian Cancer Society to help you reduce your alcohol intake:**

- Plan ahead and set a limit on the amount you will drink.
- Choose the smallest serving size. Avoid double measures or specials which are often encouraged as “better value.”
- Dilute alcoholic drinks, or choose low-calorie or low-alcohol alternatives. For example, choose a white wine spritzer rather than a full glass of wine.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are thirsty because you are likely to drink more. Have a glass of water or a non-alcoholic soft drink to quench your thirst before you have an alcoholic drink.
- Keep at least a few days each week alcohol free.
- Avoid salty snacks such as potato chips or nuts while drinking alcohol. Salt makes you thirsty and more likely to drink quickly.
- Drink alcoholic beverages slowly and space out your drinks.
- Eat before and while you are drinking.
- Do not use alcohol to cope with stress. Try a walk, a bath, read a book, exercise, or listen to music to help you relax.

*Adapted from: Canadian Cancer Society, 10 Smart Ways to Limit Alcohol.*

[www.cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/reduce-cancer-risk/make-healthy-choices/limit-alcohol/10-smart-ways-to-limit-alcohol/](http://www.cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/reduce-cancer-risk/make-healthy-choices/limit-alcohol/10-smart-ways-to-limit-alcohol/)

## Improve Your Wellbeing

Your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing are all related and affect one another. Taking action to maintain or improve even one of these areas may have positive effects on the other areas. For example, being more active can help you feel less stressed. Take time to review the suggestions in the next 3 sections.

try this

### Living Your Best Life With and Beyond Cancer: Video Series



[myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/cancer-lybl](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/cancer-lybl)

- Scroll the page to see which videos interest you
- Print or download the guide on the website to help plan things you would like to try

## E

## Manage Physical Wellbeing

### E1. Improve your nutrition

Healthy eating is important for everyone, especially as you recover from treatment.

try these

#### Explore resources to help you eat well

- **Canada's Food Guide** — describes the amount and type of food you need to eat healthy.

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) » [Canada Food Guide](#)

If you have long term side effects from your cancer treatment, these guidelines may not be right for you.

If you are not sure, meet a registered dietitian who can help you develop a plan right for you. Ask your healthcare provider or call Health Link (☎ 811) to find a dietitian near you.



#### Try to get the recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals each day

- **Calcium** is important for muscles and bones. Try to get most of your calcium with food sources and only take supplements as needed.

Check to see how much calcium is in your diet at

[osteoporosis.ca/nutrition/](http://osteoporosis.ca/nutrition/)

Calcium:  
**1000-1200 mg per day**

- **Vitamin D** is known as the "sunshine" vitamin. It is not found naturally in many foods, so we recommend you take a supplement everyday. If you are taking a multivitamin, check the label for the amount of vitamin D.

Vitamin D:  
**1000-2000 iu per day**

## E2. Increase your physical activity

### Be Active

Being active after your cancer treatment is important. Research shows that physical activity can help reduce recurrence and increase the chance of survival.

Physical activity can also help with:

- fatigue (tiredness)
- depression, anxiety and mood
- sleep problems
- maintaining a healthy weight
- the risk of lymphedema (swelling)

**Make sure you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before starting any physical activity.**

If you are using a trainer or exercise professional, ask if they are certified and if they have cancer-specific exercise training.

### Getting Started

- Choose an activity or exercise you enjoy.
- The activity should not be too easy or too hard. You should be able to talk but not sing while doing the exercise.
- Start slowly and build from your current level of activity.
- Try different types of exercise. Do some that get your heart rate up and others that build strength and flexibility.

#### If you are not exercising yet:

- Do some light activity
- Start with something small, add or change something in your normal routine

See [Tips for Getting More Active](#)



#### If you are exercising regularly:

- It's ok to change your routine and rest more if you are too tired
- Increase the amount of exercise a little more every day until you are back to your normal routines

As fitness improves, you can slowly increase the time you exercise or how hard.

It is never too soon or too late to start exercising or becoming more active. Remember, every bit of movement helps! **Start from where you are and work from there.**



## Exercise Safety After Cancer Treatment

After your treatment, you may need to be careful if you have:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Low bone density (weakness of the bone)</b>                                  | Weight bearing exercises are low impact and can help make your bones stronger (such as walking). Ask your family doctor before you do high impact activities like jumping, hopping, or running.   |
| <b>Heart problems</b>   | Get a proper medical exam before you start any exercise program. This could include a "stress test" on a treadmill or bike.   |
| <b>Taking pain medication or anti-inflammatory medications</b>                  | These types of medications may hide or "mask" your pain. If you cannot feel pain, you may push yourself too far and hurt yourself. If you take these types of medications regularly, be careful not to "over-do-it" and take care of any injuries right away. |
| <b>Recent surgery</b>   | If you had surgery recently, talk to your surgeon about physical activity to make sure you are safe to start. You need to make sure your body is ready.   |
| <b>Extreme fatigue, anemia, or peripheral neuropathy (changes in sensation)</b> | If you have extreme fatigue (tiredness), anemia (low hemoglobin), or peripheral neuropathy (numbness in your fingers or toes), talk to your family doctor before you start an exercise program.   |
| <b>Any of the above</b>   | If you are working with a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, or exercise specialist, make sure you tell them about these conditions. (You may need a doctor's referral to see these specialists).   |



## Tips for Getting More Active



### Try something new

It might be time to try a different activity. Your doctor, physiotherapist or exercise professional may also have ideas that can make certain activities easier for you.

### Move more - get active with your everyday activities

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Take a walk for your coffee break or at lunch
- Park farther away from your destination and walk to where you are going (remember to plan to leave a little earlier)
- Make your chores active: wash the car by hand, scrub the bathtub and shower by hand, dance with the vacuum or mop, or work in the yard with a hand mower and pruning shears

For ideas and more motivation:  [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) »  **Let's Make Our Day Harder**



### Try low impact activities

- Some activities are easier on your joints and reduce your chance of hurting yourself, such as:
  - \* swimming
  - \* elliptical trainers
  - \* pilates
  - \* bike riding
  - \* water aerobics
  - \* yoga
  - \* tai-chi
- Follow all the safety recommendations, such as wearing a helmet or working with a qualified instructor.
- Look for cancer-specific exercise programs in your community.

### Do the "couch potato" workout

- During every commercial break, get some activity instead of flipping channels:
  - \* jog on the spot
  - \* skip rope
  - \* stretch your muscles
  - \* do jumping jacks
  - \* dance around the room
  - \* do core work
- 2 hours of TV can give you 30 minutes of activity for the day.

### Join a gym or physical activity program

Make sure the activity is right for you and there are qualified instructors.



### E3. Know and use integrative and complementary therapies responsibly

#### What are integrative and complementary therapies?

These include different healing approaches and therapies not considered to be standard medical treatments.

- **Standard medical treatments** are scientifically tested and researched and include treatments such as radiation, surgery, and systemic treatment (such as chemotherapy or hormone therapy). These treatments are used by doctors to treat people with cancer.
- **Complementary medicine** is used along with standard medical treatments. It is meant to help relieve symptoms or side effects, or boost emotional or physical health.

**Talk to your surgeon, oncologist or family doctor if you are thinking about using complementary therapies or if you have any questions or problems.** Check with your pharmacist or registered dietitian to see if there are possible interactions with medications or supplements.



#### Does my healthcare team need to know if I am using integrative or complementary therapies?

**Yes.** Tell your doctor or nurse about anything you are taking or using. Some complementary therapies interact with other medicine you take. It's always best to talk to your healthcare team before you start any additional treatments or therapies.

These include things like:

- pills
- vitamins
- massage
- hyperbaric oxygen treatment
- injections
- herbal remedies
- acupuncture
- cannabis



Complementary Therapies include many different therapies and practices:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Meditation, hypnosis, guided imagery, and art and music therapy</b><br/>(mind-body medicine)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research has shown these therapies can improve the quality of life of cancer patients.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Natural health products like vitamins, minerals and herbs</b><br/>(biological-based practice)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many people think of “natural products” as safe and without risk. But natural health products can cause side effects, if they are taken in the wrong doses or mixed with other medications.</li> <li>• Research is starting to show that some natural health products can help in the prevention and treatment of cancer. But, more research is needed to understand.</li> <li>• Talk to your pharmacist or dietitian if you are taking or thinking of starting natural health products.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Chiropractic and massage therapy</b><br/>(manipulative and body-based practice)</p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These may help reduce anxiety, depression, pain, and fatigue. Check with your doctor to see if massage is a good idea for you. There may be some concern if there is too much pressure applied to certain areas such as tumour or surgery sites.</li> <li>• If you have disease that has spread around your spine, chiropractic care is not an option for you. Talk with your doctor.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Acupuncture, reiki, therapeutic touch, magnet therapy, and qi gong</b><br/>(energy therapies)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to do more research in this area but one energy therapy shown to help is acupuncture. Acupuncture must be done with sterilized needles.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Whole Medical Systems</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations Traditional Healing, Naturopathy, and Traditional Chinese Medicine, Aryurvedic Medicine, etc.</li> </ul>  |



For more information:

- **Integrative and Complementary Therapies and Cancer resource sheet**

 available at your cancer centre or

 [www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare) > **Other Wellness Supports**

- **CAMEO**

 [www.cameoprogram.org](http://www.cameoprogram.org)

- **Canadian Cancer Society**

 [www.bit.ly/CCS-complementary-and-alternative-therapies](http://www.bit.ly/CCS-complementary-and-alternative-therapies)



## F

## Manage Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing

Mental health is a positive sense of wellbeing, or feeling that you can enjoy life and manage challenges. Good wellbeing does not mean you never feel upset or have difficult situations. It means you feel you can cope when you need to.

Being a caregiver or support person of someone with cancer can be challenging. You may want to share this section of the book with the support person(s) in your life.

### Things you can do to help your wellbeing:

#### Connect

Spend time with people you care about such as your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Develop these and other new relationships. Consider joining a support or community group.

#### Be Active

Find an activity you enjoy and make it a part of your life. Take a walk, ...



#### Keep Learning

Learn new skills to help boost your confidence. Sign up for that cooking course, learn to play a musical instrument, or fix your bike.

#### Give Back

Small acts have big impact, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering can help you meet new people and improve your wellbeing.

#### Be Mindful

Pay attention to the present moment—your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness “mindfulness”. It can change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

#### Live Your Balance

You do not have to do everything or see everyone. Figure out what is most meaningful to you and make it a priority. Ask for help if you need it or consider saying "no, thank you" if it helps you live a better balance.

Other specific actions are covered in the next 4 sections and are listed on your Menu of Options.

Adapted from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing>



## F1. Make sense of your cancer experience

After completing your treatment, you may have a mix of feelings. You may feel:

- happiness and relief
- sad or lost
- afraid or anxious

Many people feel a combination of all three and are surprised by this. After treatment you may have the emotional and physical energy to seek counselling to make sense of what has happened to you.

try these

- speak to a psychologist, social worker, spiritual care provider or ...  therapist (see [page 35](#))
- speak with others who have been through a similar experience
- develop your personal plan for moving forward and living well (the same support program, resource or wellness plan does not work for everyone)

?

### How can I find my “new normal”?

People with cancer often have trouble getting back to “normal” routines and daily activities after they finish cancer treatment. This can lead to feelings of guilt, frustration and loss. This can be even worse if they – or their family members, friends or employers – have expectations that are not realistic. Some people find they no longer like the same activities or have developed new interests.

People who experience cancer often develop a “new normal.” Their lives change from the way they were before cancer but, in the words of one cancer patient, “Your life will be different after cancer, but it doesn’t have to be worse”.



try this

### Be accepting

It can be hard to accept the changes that cancer and its treatment have brought to your health, body and life. Trying to accept your experience may help you to move past what has happened, and move on.

- It can help to think about and share your cancer experience.
- Try looking at your experience differently. Did you learn anything new or have a positive change in your relationships because of your cancer experience?
- Talk to a friend, family member or counsellor about your experience and what you are struggling with.



## F2. Explore ways of managing fear and uncertainty

After cancer treatment finishes people sometimes find their fear can be overwhelming and other times find it more manageable. This is normal! The anniversary date of diagnosis or follow-up appointments can cause fear and anxiety. There are things you can do to help manage these feelings and live your life the way you want to.

### ? I worry about the cancer coming back like when I have aches or pains. What will help?

Aches and pains can be normal as we age. If you have a new, unexplained pain that will not go away or gets worse, talk to your doctor. For other worries:



- Practice a healthy lifestyle (physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellness)
- Maintain a good relationship with your healthcare provider
- Try to keep a sense of hope, optimism, and humour
- Find support from family, friends, support programs, and professionals

### ? What can I do about fear and uncertainty?



**Express your feelings** – including the unpleasant ones like fear, anxiety, uncertainty, sadness, or frustration. There are lots of ways to do this:

- Share your feelings with a trusted friend or family member
- Attend a support group, or try [www.cancerconnection.ca](http://www.cancerconnection.ca)
- Meditate or pray
- Go for a walk or get some exercise



### Manage your medical concerns

If you feel like your cancer follow-up is being managed well, you may feel less anxious about the future and you may worry less about the cancer coming back.

- Talk with your oncology team or family doctor about what you should watch for and what tests you will need and when.
- See your family doctor for regular check-ups, and your medical concerns.
- Find out more about how to take care of yourself after cancer, including activity and eating well after cancer.



**Focus on the positive.** This does not mean you should be positive all the time – that is not realistic or healthy. It just means taking the time to focus on something positive to help you feel better.

- Focus on living each moment and day as it comes instead of thinking about what comes next.
- Look for positive things in your day or your life and practice feeling grateful for them.
- When you do feel fear, try changing activities. Do not let the fear take over. Sometimes just doing something else can help your mind think about other, more positive things.
- Look for ways to relax and manage your stress. Laugh, go to a movie, get outdoors, or do an activity to help you relax.
- Find something that brings a sense of purpose or meaning to your life.
- Ask yourself if there is something you can do to deal with your fear, like getting more information, talking to someone or seeing your doctor. If there is, take action.

### Get support

Having people around you who can give you support may help you manage your fear and uncertainty.

- Being honest with trusted loved ones is worth trying. Telling some loved ones about how you feel, including your challenges and concerns may get you understanding and support.
- Make plans with people who make you feel better rather than worse.
- Ask for the kinds of support you need in a clear and direct way. People often want to help but are not sure how. Try asking for specific things like “Can you pick my daughter up from school today?” or “Can you bring something over for dinner on Saturday?”
- Talk to, or read about people who have had similar experiences. You can look at online and in person support groups, discussion forums as well as blogs or books written by cancer survivors.



## F3. Manage stress

Stress is how your body responds to change, including changes in feelings, situations, or people. Stress can be good or bad, depending on what is going on.

**? Why am I feeling stress?** When you experience change, your body uses energy to deal with that change. If the change lasts for a long time, or many things happen at once, your body will start to run out of energy.

The changes with cancer create a lot of stress. After treatment, this stress could be because of family changes, treatment side effects or pushing yourself too hard.

You can help manage your stress by talking to someone about the change, increasing your exercise, improving your sleep, or asking for help.

### **try this** Manage your stress better

- Know your stress signs: you may be able to take action before you start feeling burnt out or unable to cope.
- Reach out and ask for help from people in your community: You do not have to do everything yourself. For example, if you have to drive in for an appointment, you may need to ask someone else to get the kids to school and that's okay!
- Use what you know or try something new: There are things you probably already do to handle stress such as exercising, talking, or organizing your time. Continue to use or try new ways of handling stress.
- Try or continue professional help: You may need help finding or practicing ways to manage stress.  p. 35
- Try to manage stress in healthy ways. If you find yourself eating poorly, or smoking or drinking more, reach out for help.  p. 22

### Did stress cause my cancer?

We do not know if stress causes cancer. But, because stress is a normal part of life, it can be helpful to find ways to reduce it. This may help you feel healthier and happier.



## F4. Manage anxiety or depression

### Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of worry about things that may happen in the future. It is common to have more worry or anxiety during and after treatment as you cope with life changes, decisions, and challenges. Counselling or a combination of medication and counselling can help with anxiety.

**Getting help is important, so talk to your doctor about your options.**

#### Is there anything I can try on my own?



- Learn what triggers your anxiety and what helps
- Get support from family, friends, spiritual or religious groups, support groups, and counsellors
- Practice mind/body activities: breathing techniques, yoga, meditation, guided imagery, soothing music, and mindfulness



### Depression

Depression is different from sadness. It lasts longer and has more symptoms. Depression can make it difficult to live your life in a way that is healthy, enjoyable and meaningful.

Some people experience depression before, during or after treatment while others do not experience depression at all. It can depend on your:

- type of cancer
- stage of disease
- symptoms and how severe they are
- support systems and how good they are
- history of mental health issues

#### How do I know if I have depression?



Everyone experiences some symptoms of depression from time to time and it may not mean a person has a depressive illness. You may be depressed if you feel sad, unhappy or miserable, most of the time for **more than 2 weeks**.

If you think you might be depressed, talk with a doctor.





## What are the signs and symptoms of being clinically depressed?

The list below is only to be used as a guide. Not every person who has depression will have all of these symptoms, but common symptoms include:

- Not going out anymore or loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- Withdrawing from close family and friends; being less social
- Not able to concentrate or get things done at work or school
- Feeling overwhelmed, have difficulty making decisions and lacking in confidence
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Loss or change of appetite, or gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep, or are tired during the day
- Feeling worthless, helpless and guilty
- More frustrated or moody
- Feeling unhappy, sad or miserable most of the time
- Thoughts such as, “I’m a failure”, “life’s not worth living”, “people would be better off without me”



Sometimes symptoms of depression are the same as those caused by treatment, your side effects, or your medications. This can make it difficult to know if you are experiencing depression.

For example, low energy is a common symptom after treatment, and does not necessarily mean you are depressed.

It is important to talk with your doctor and healthcare team.



## Depression can be treated

There are many treatment options available. Some people will need counselling or psychiatry services, medications, or a combination. Support from family, friends and self-help groups can also make a big difference.



There are lots of different things you can do to manage depression:

- Stay active and make plans for the day
- Do an activity or hobby that you enjoy
- Look after your body by staying active, eating healthy and getting plenty of sleep
- Avoid use of alcohol and/or street drugs — it can make anxiety and depression worse

Other strong feelings such as anger or sadness can come up.  
Talk with a professional if you need help coping with these emotions.



If you have any thoughts about harming yourself or anyone else **call 911** or go to the **nearest emergency room right away**

## F5. Connect with a psychologist, social worker, spiritual care provider or therapist

After treatment, you may find you are affected spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, physically, financially, or practically. You and your family can get free professional support without a referral.

If you've never had professional counselling you may wonder how it works. In a session you will usually:

1. Explore and identify concerns
2. Understand how these concerns relate to your life and how you think
3. Take action about your concerns, or learn to live with them in a different way

### Psychosocial Oncology

The Psychosocial Oncology team are professionals with different specialties and may include psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers or spiritual care providers. They offer different supports and services to patients and family members to help reduce emotional distress and explore how to cope. They can help with things such as communication, stress, coping with treatment side effects, mood changes, quality of life, body image or loneliness. They also make referrals to other community resources as needed.

Call to speak with someone and find out what services are available.

Visit [www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare) » **Psychosocial Oncology** for links to the various cancer centres or view the brochure



### Other resources

#### Cancer Care Alberta Classes, Groups, and Events

 [www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses](http://www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses)

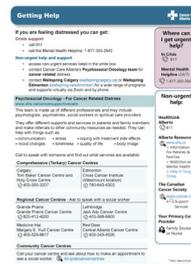
#### Getting Help

Where to find urgent and non-urgent help in Alberta.

[bit.ly/ccagettinghelp](http://bit.ly/ccagettinghelp)

#### Help in Tough Times

 <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/page16759.aspx>



## Where else can I get help?

### In Crisis

 911

### Psychosocial Oncology



[www.ahs.ca/cancer-supportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancer-supportivecare)

» Psychosocial Oncology

### Mental Health Helpline (24/7)

 1-877-303-2642

### HealthLink Alberta

 811

### Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention



[suicideprevention.ca/help-and-information/](http://suicideprevention.ca/help-and-information/)

### The Canadian Cancer Society

 [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

» Support Services

### Your Primary Care Provider

 Family Doctor or Nurse



## G

## Manage Social Wellbeing

## G1. Changing your roles and managing priorities

When someone has cancer, priorities can change. Family members sometimes take on new roles and responsibilities. For example, children may have to help out more, or a spouse may have to help with groceries or other things. It can be hard to make these changes.

When treatment ends people might expect you to be and feel just like you did before you were diagnosed and think you no longer need their support or help. They might not understand that even though your treatment is over, you may still not be feeling well. They, or you, may be frustrated because you aren't back to your usual routines. Or, they may worry about you and try to stop you from doing much, even though you feel ready.

**Changing priorities are normal and part of the cancer experience.**

### ? How can I adapt to my changing priorities?

try  
these

#### Take Time

- Decide what's most important to you and where to focus your energy
- Give yourself and people close to you time to sort through thoughts and feelings
- Understand that at first some tasks may not be done as well as they were before

#### Talk

- Share your feelings with others. Be honest and open about how you're feeling
- Let others know when you are ready to do a chore or task you did before you had cancer, or if you are not ready for it just yet
- Tell people if you still need help or support, and what type of help you need

#### Connect

- Connect with other cancer survivors so you can talk to someone other than family or friends
- Try an online forum or a support group



[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)



» talking about cancer



## G2. Try hobbies or activities; community or support groups

### Try hobbies or activities

Hobbies can be a great way to relieve stress, meet new people and try something new or creative. Find one that fits your personality and interests. Hobbies can help you:

- fill your time in a way you enjoy
- help you make new friends or connect with others socially
- learn something new
- actively engage in leisure activities
- help you cope with stress

### Join a community or support group (in person or online)

Support groups can be a place to meet others in similar situations. Some are led by healthcare professionals while others are led by community members. They can be held in person or online. Check with your healthcare team to see if there are any local support groups that might be a good fit for you.



#### Canadian Cancer Society

It might help to talk with someone who has also had cancer and finished treatment. The Canadian Cancer Society's **Cancer Connection** program offers peer-to-peer support to cancer patients and their caregivers. You can talk with caregivers or current and former patients with your same type of cancer.



1-888-939-3333



[www.cancerconnection.ca](http://www.cancerconnection.ca)

#### Cancer Chat Canada

Professionally facilitated online support groups  [cancerchat.desouzainstitute.com](http://cancerchat.desouzainstitute.com)

#### Wellspring

Wellspring is a community organization that offers one-on-one sessions for those diagnosed with cancer and their caregivers to meet with trained volunteers who have experience with cancer. Wellspring also hosts meetings for several support groups.

- Calgary (South)    403-521-5292    [www.wellspringcalgary.ca](http://www.wellspringcalgary.ca)
- Edmonton (North)    780-758-4433    [www.wellspring.ca/edmonton](http://www.wellspring.ca/edmonton)



### G3. Explore return to work or school options

It is normal to need time after treatment to recover mentally and physically. If you plan to return to work, talk with your healthcare team and workplace or disability provider about the right timing for you. You may need to return to work or school gradually.



If your cancer or treatments are limiting your abilities to return to work or school, working with a psychosocial or rehabilitation specialist may help. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral or see [pages 15](#) and [35](#) for phone numbers.

Tools and resources to help you understand, plan, and return to work are available:



[www.cancerandwork.ca](http://www.cancerandwork.ca)

[www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare](http://www.ahs.ca/cancersupportivecare) > Rehabilitation Oncology > Returning to Work or School

### G4. Make or review an advance care plan

Your cancer experience may help you understand how you want healthcare decisions handled in the future if you have serious health issues.

Advance care planning can help you:

- think about, talk about, and write down your wishes for healthcare.
- help you make healthcare decisions now and for the future.
- tell others what is important if you become ill and unable to communicate.

Talk to your family doctor, oncologist or member of your healthcare team, to find out more.



#### How can I prepare?



**Talk** with family and friends, and consider legally naming someone your **Alternate Decision Maker** (the person who will speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself). Make sure you complete the necessary paperwork.

**Write down** your wishes and talk with healthcare providers and financial or legal professionals.

For more information:

- **Alberta Health Services Advance Care Planning**

 [www.conversationsmatter.ca](http://www.conversationsmatter.ca)

- **Human Services Alberta**

Personal directives and other options for making decisions about personal matters.

 [www.alberta.ca](http://www.alberta.ca)

»  Advance Care Planning

- **Speak Up - Advance Care Planning in Canada**

National interactive online workbooks, guides and resources.

 [www.advancecareplanning.ca](http://www.advancecareplanning.ca)



# Set Priorities and Take Action

Taking action to improve your health or wellbeing does not have to be overwhelming. **When you are ready**, this section will give you some tips and information on how you can take the next step — however big or small it may be.

The **Menu of Options** on [pages iii and iv](#) have ideas for goals and actions. These match the headings in the first 2 sections of this book. The dark blue and green bubbles are more general. The lighter colored bubbles are more specific. You may want to pick these as one of your goals or actions.

Finally, throughout the book very specific actions are identified with  or  that you may want to try at any time. Do not think about doing it all. Focus on one or two actions. Use these 5 steps to help you succeed.

*One thing at a time, one step at a time,  
adding up over time.*

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p><b>What will help me the most now?</b><br/>Write down your goal.</p>   |  |
| 2 | <p><b>Why is taking action important to me?</b></p>   |   |
| 3 | <p><b>What could I do to reach my goal?</b><br/>Write down your ideas.</p>  |   |
| 4 | <p><b>What can I do in the next 2 weeks?</b><br/>Pick 1 action from Step 3 and make a plan.</p>   |   |
| 5 | <p><b>Check back: how did it go?</b></p>  |   |
|   | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #e67e22; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Not well.</b><br/>Go to <a href="#">page 40</a> for ideas about what to do next.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #e67e22; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Success!</b><br/>Pick another action or a next step to work on.</p> </div> </div> |   |



# H Develop a Plan

## H1. Choosing your priorities



### What will help me the most now?

Ask yourself: **what will benefit me the most now?** There may be many things you want to work on or improve. By focusing on one thing at a time, you improve your chances of success. Choose something that will help you most **right now**. Pick something from the **Menu of Options** or brainstorm your own ideas.

### Setting a goal

Choosing a priority can also be called **setting a goal**. Write down your goal. Goals can:

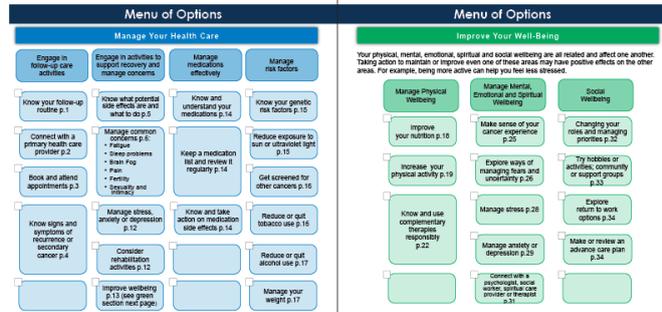
- help you stay focused
- change your mindset
- help motivate you to take action

Some examples of goals might be:

- get or connect with a family doctor
- quit smoking
- get a more restful sleep
- hike in the mountains
- spend more time with my family

### Having trouble thinking of a goal?

The Menu of Options has many goals to choose from (see [pages iii and iv](#)).



### Examples:



**What will help me the most now?**  
Write down your goal.

**Example 1: Doctor**  
Get a family doctor.

**Example 2: Physical Activity**  
Get more physically active.



**Remember to add your goal to the worksheet** ...

Tips for writing an action plan are on [page 44](#).



2

### Why is taking action important to me?

Knowing why this change is important will help you keep going on days when taking action is difficult.

Your healthcare team may suggest things you could do to manage a health condition or improve your wellbeing.

This is important to consider, but it is also really important to think about what matters to you.

What reasons do you have for working on the goal you have selected? Think about your values, priorities and reasons for taking action. Maybe you want to spend more time with your family, hike in the mountains, or feel calmer in the evenings to get a more restful sleep.

**Knowing what is important to you may help you to take steps to manage your health and improve your wellbeing even when it is difficult.** Writing it down will help you remember your reason for taking action.

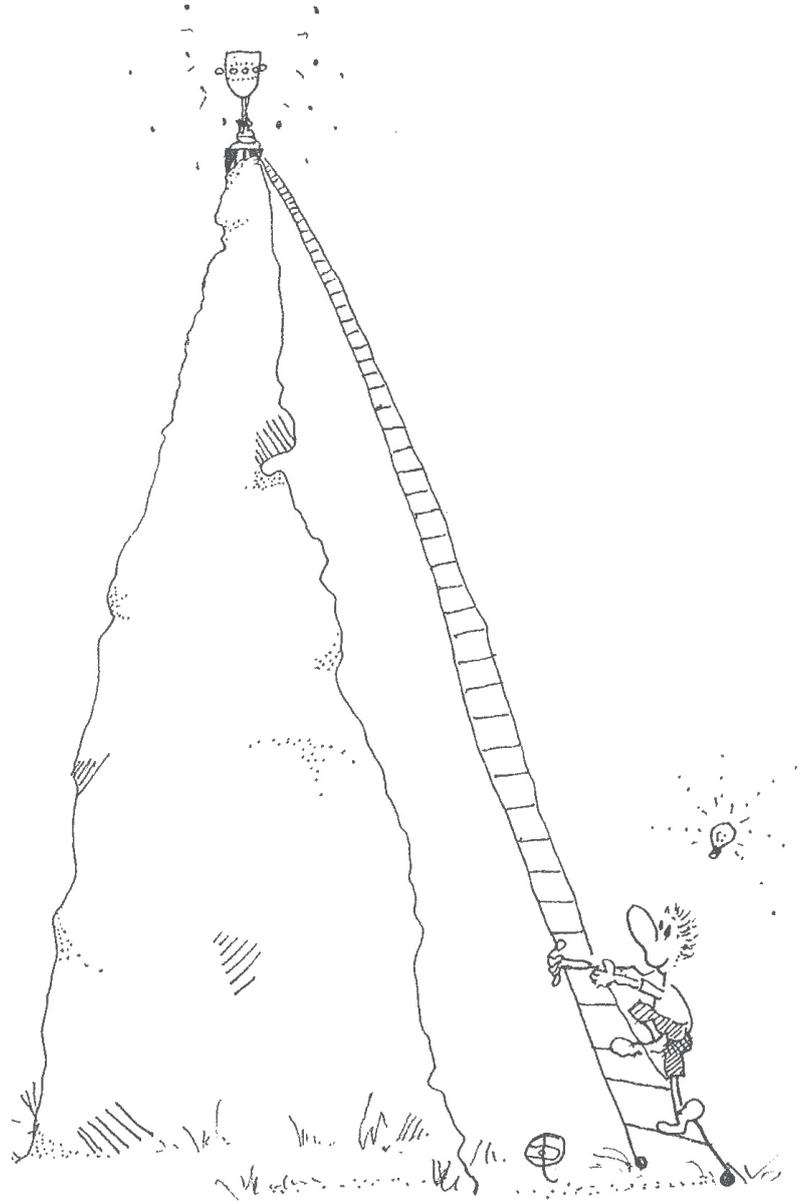
**Examples:**

2

**Why is taking action important to me?**

**Example 1: Doctor**  
I want a care team I can trust and talk to and I will feel less anxious when I know someone is there to help me.

**Example 2: Physical Activity**  
I love getting outside for hikes with my friends and family. It gives me energy and I love the mountains.



**HealthChange® One Step at a Time, Adding up over Time**

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## H2. Make a plan

3

### What could I do to reach my goal?

Most goals take time to meet. Think of some actions (sometimes called **objectives**) you can do to work toward your goal. You can find ideas in this book.

**Write down your ideas.**

### Examples:

3

#### What could I do to reach my goal?

Write down your ideas.

#### Example 1: Doctor

1. Find a doctor taking new patients:
  - Ask friends
  - Check online
    - »  [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)
    - »  find a doctor
  - Call 811 (Health Link)
2. Make an appointment.
3. Meet with the doctor to see if they are the right fit for me.

#### Example 2: Physical Activity

1. Walk every day to build up my fitness level.
2. Choose a hike to work toward that inspires me.
3. Connect with a friend to exercise with.
4. Find a walking or hiking group to join.

### One step at a time

Change happens one step at a time. Give yourself permission to focus on one thing. As you gain confidence and make progress, you will feel ready and able to take the next step. All of these actions add up over time.





### What can I do in the next 2 weeks?

Look at step 3 and decide on 1 action you will commit to over the next 2 weeks and make a plan. Be sure to include how and when you will do it.

#### Examples:



#### What can I do in the next 2 weeks?

Pick 1 action from Step 3 and make a plan.

##### Example 1: Doctor

1. Find doctors taking new patients.

##### How and when?

- I will go on the AHS website by Sunday to find doctors near me.
- I will write down the names and numbers to call.

##### Example 2: Physical Activity

1. Walk every day to build up my fitness level.

##### How and when?

- I will walk 3 times a week for 30 minutes
- I will count my weeks from Monday to Sunday (a new week will start every Monday)
- I will write reminders to walk in my calendar

A few helpful strategies to keep you going:



**Track your progress.** Write down, count or track what you are doing to help you focus on your plan and what is or is not working.

Tips:

- Track success. Count the positive behaviour you have achieved. Seeing the progress you are making toward your goal is motivating and encouraging.  
For example, do not track how often you missed taking your walk, track the days you went!
- Use a calendar, day-timer, smart phone or chart to count your successes.
- Use a journal or notepad to write things you found worked or were challenges.



**Set a reward.** Sometimes it can help to set a reward for yourself. As you take steps toward your goal, you can set rewards for bigger accomplishments (such as rewarding yourself for walking 3 times a week for a number of weeks in a row).



### Tips when making an action plan

**Be specific.** The more specific you are with your action plan, the better the chance you have to meet your goal. For example, if you are trying to be more active, saying "I will walk 20 minutes, 3 times per week" is better than saying "I will walk more." Walking "more" is too general and does not give you something to work toward.

**Leave room for flexibility.** Do not tie your action to a particular time or place. For example, it is better to say "I will walk for 20 minutes, 3 times a week" than say "I will walk Friday night from 6:00 pm-6:20 pm." The reason is, if you cannot meet your action plan for Friday night, you may decide to give up for the week. But, if your plan is for the week, it gives you other times and options to complete it. So, in this example, if you miss Friday night, you could still go on Saturday.

**Be realistic.** Make an action that is challenging but that you can do. Making a plan that is too big can be discouraging.

**Create "if...then..." plans.** Think about what might keep you from succeeding and create a plan to manage it. For example, if your plan is to walk outside, create a plan for bad weather. You might decide, "if it rains the day I plan to walk, then I will pick a different day" or "if the weather is bad, then I will walk for 20 minutes on the treadmill instead."

Here are some action words that might help you to write your plans:

- Ask
- Call
- Connect
- Develop
- Explore
- Find
- List
- Practice
- Read
- Schedule
- Sleep
- Stretch
- Try
- Use
- Walk



### H3. Check back

5

#### How did it go?

Look at how you are doing with your plan. You might be successful. You might need to rework a few things. Either way, congratulate yourself for setting a goal and trying to work towards it.



#### My plan is working! What's next?

You have 2 options:

1. **Move to the next step.** This might mean adding on another action or increasing the amount you are already doing. For example, if you are walking 3 times a week you may want to add on more days a week, or add on more time to your walks.

You may need to go back to **Step 3** to think about or choose other actions you could do to meet your goal. Remember to keep it specific, realistic and a little bit challenging!

##### Example 1: Doctor

**Success!** I found 3 doctors taking patients near my home.

##### Plan the next step:

Make an appointment (write down how and when).

##### Example 2: Physical Activity

**Success!** I am walking 30 minutes, 3 times a week.

##### Plan the next step:

Add on more time or more days per week (write down how and when).

2. **Pick another goal.** If you have reached your final goal, well done! Is there something else in your life which could use some action or change? You may want to pick another goal and create a new plan for yourself. Go back to **Step 2**.



#### My plan is not working. What should I do?

Do not feel bad if things are not working out as planned.

1. **What is keeping me from succeeding?** Look at the events that happened before or after the action you planned. This might help you see what gets in the way of your success. It may be your thoughts, feelings, the physical environment or a situation. If you know what is getting in the way, you can change your plan to improve your chances of success.

Ask yourself:

- Is my plan too big?
- What messages am I telling myself?
- Am I following all the steps I planned?
- What is getting in the way?



## 2. Change your plan.

- Look at the actions you set and break them down into smaller steps
- Find support or help (ask a friend to check in with you; join a program or group to help you meet your goal)
- Choose a different action to meet your goal

## 3. Track your progress.

If you are not writing or tracking your progress, you may want to start. If you have started but find you do not do it regularly, consider changing the way you are tracking. It should be quick and easy.

### Examples:

5

Check back: how did it go?

#### Example 1: Doctor

**I have not succeeded yet.**

#### Why not?

I am not comfortable using the computer.

#### How I will change my plan:

I will ask a friend to search for me or I will call HealthLink (811)

#### Example 2: Physical Activity

**I have not succeeded yet.**

#### Why not?

I just do not have the energy to walk 30 minutes at a time.

#### How I will change my plan:

I will walk 15 minutes, 3 times a week.

## Keep going even if you have a set-back!

Sometimes it can take many tries before you find something that works.



## H4. Worksheet



Use this to get you started. You may want to copy this into a diary or onto another page.

|  | Manage Healthcare | Improve Wellbeing |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| <p><b>1</b> What will help me the most?<br/>Write down your goal.</p>              |                   |                   |
| <p><b>2</b> Why is taking action important to me?</p>                              |                   |                   |
| <p><b>3</b> What can I do to reach my goal?</p>                                    |                   |                   |
| <p><b>4</b> Pick 1 action that you can do in the next 2 weeks and make a plan.</p> |                   |                   |
| <p><b>5</b> Check back: how did it go?</p>   |                   |                   |



## I

## More Resources to Help You Succeed

If you need help making a plan or sticking to it, you may want to try:

### Alberta Healthy Living Program (AHLP)

AHLP provides services to those with chronic conditions (such as recovery from cancer) in communities throughout Alberta. These services include information, education, techniques, and support to help improve your health and quality of life.

 [www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page13984.aspx](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page13984.aspx)

### Better Choices, Better Health® Program

This is a self-management program offered by the AHLP. It includes free online or in-person workshops that support people with chronic health conditions (including cancer survivors) to learn how to better manage their health. The program includes information on how to make healthy lifestyle changes, deal with difficult emotions, develop communication skills, use medications, and work with your Healthcare team.

 [www.ahs.ca/services/bcbh.aspx](http://www.ahs.ca/services/bcbh.aspx)

### Cancer Care Alberta - Classes and Events

Local and provincial classes, workshops and other special events are available at different cancer centres. Check with your local centre or go online for provincial events. Enjoy live presentations and recorded presentation on wellness and other classes.

 [www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses](http://www.ahs.ca/cancerclasses)

### Programs offered by your local primary care network

 <https://pcnpmo.ca/alberta-pcns>

### Searching for reliable online information

Anyone can share information online and individual opinions can be confusing, scary or unrealistic. Follow these tips to help you find reliable, evidence-based information:

- Check to see if the information is current (less than 5 years old)
- Check for the credentials of the author (such as a doctor, nurse or psychologist)

More tips:

- AHS Knowledge Resource professionals have a number of website 'Best Bets'
  -  [krs.libguides.com/cancer/patientresources](http://krs.libguides.com/cancer/patientresources)
  -  [bit.ly/tipsonline2](http://bit.ly/tipsonline2)



If you find information that is new or different than what you were told at the cancer centre, talk to your healthcare team. Your healthcare providers can help clarify or correct information and help relate information to your diagnosis and treatment.



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The information is to be updated every 3 years, or as new clinical evidence emerges. If there are any concerns, updates, or broken links, please email [cancerpatienteducation@ahs.ca](mailto:cancerpatienteducation@ahs.ca).

## Cancer Care Alberta

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[www.cancercarealberta.ca](http://www.cancercarealberta.ca)

