

Information for  
patients & families

# Living well with cancer



General information



Cancer Care  
Alberta

## **You are not alone—help and hope are here.**

Living with cancer can bring many changes and challenges. You may be learning about your diagnosis, receiving treatment or adjusting to life after treatment. At any stage, it's normal to have questions and feelings.

Cancer Care Alberta (CCA) is here to support you and your family. We work with you to guide you, answer your questions and help you find the care and resources you need.

This book was created to help you live as well as possible with cancer. Inside, you'll find information about your health and ways to care for your body and mind. It will also help you find support for you and your loved ones.

No matter where you are in your experience with cancer, help is always available.

**We are here for you.**

This book was created to help you and the people around you better understand what is happening and to support you in caring for both your body and mind during this time. It is for people living with cancer—during treatment, after treatment or when cancer is ongoing—as well as for family members, friends and caregivers who support them.

This book is made to help you feel better, understand ways to deal with emotions and know where to get help and support when you need it.

Start by looking at the table of contents. The book is split into four parts:

- Understanding and adjusting to your diagnosis
- Building your circle of support
- Nurturing your mind and body
- Navigating everyday life

You don't have to read the whole book—pick and choose the sections you want to know more about.

Use the book in whatever way works best for you:

- Jump to the part you want to read
- Read a little at a time or read the whole book
- Write notes
- Highlight important information

If there is anything you do not understand, ask your healthcare team to review it with you.

## For more information

This book, along with other Cancer Care Alberta resources, is available at your cancer centre or online. Visit [cancercarealberta.ca](http://cancercarealberta.ca)

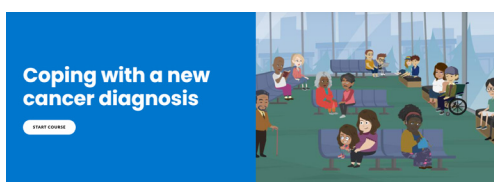
Classes on nutrition, tiredness (fatigue) and more: [bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents](http://bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents)

Find community support resources with **Alberta 211**:

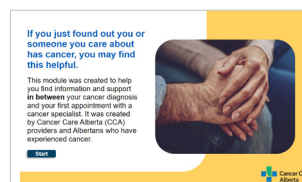
- Online at [ab.211.ca](http://ab.211.ca) or call 211

These two modules will help you soon after your cancer diagnosis, but you can use them anytime. In *Between Getting a Cancer Diagnosis & Your First Cancer Care Appointment* explains what to do next and how to get ready for care. *Coping With a New Cancer Diagnosis* focuses on feelings and ways to cope. Together, they support both practical needs and emotional well-being.

Take the online course:  
**Coping with a New Cancer Diagnosis.**  
Visit [redcap.link/coping\\_cancer](http://redcap.link/coping_cancer)



Take the online course: **In Between Getting a Cancer Diagnosis and Your First Cancer Care Appointment.** Visit [bit.ly/CCAInBetween](http://bit.ly/CCAInBetween)



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# Overview of options

## Understanding and adjusting to your diagnosis

Learning that you have cancer can be overwhelming. You may have many questions, worries or mixed emotions as you begin to understand what your diagnosis means. This section helps you make sense of the information you receive and care for your emotional well-being.

You'll find tips on coping with feelings like fear, anxiety or sadness and guidance on when and where to ask for help. Remember, it's okay to reach out for support—you don't have to face this alone.

### A. About your diagnosis

A1. Understanding your diagnosis

A2. Coping after diagnosis

### B. Emotional self-care and awareness

B1. What is anxiety?

B2. What is depression?

B3. Coping with difficult emotions

B4. Living with fear of progression or recurrence

B5. When and where to get help

# Overview of options

## Building your circle of support

Having support can make living with cancer a little easier. This section helps you find ways to connect with family, friends and others who understand what you're going through. You'll also learn about support groups, spiritual health, patient navigators and resources for different communities, as well as support for caregivers.

Knowing where to turn and how to ask for help can improve your quality of life and give you strength every day.

### C. Support systems and communication

C1. Talking to family, friends and children

C3. Spiritual health and finding meaning

C5. Support for LGBTQ2S+ people

C7. Support for Black Canadian, African & Caribbean peoples

C2. Finding support groups and peer support

C4. Cancer patient navigators

C6. Support for Indigenous Peoples

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### D. Palliative care: Improving quality of life

D1. What palliative care can offer

D2. Managing symptoms such as pain and fatigue

D3. Emotional and spiritual support

D4. Hoping for the best, planning for the rest

# Overview of options

## Nurturing your mind and body

Taking care of your body and mind can help you feel stronger and more in control during and after cancer treatment. This section covers practical tips on nutrition, physical activity, sleep, managing stress and mental clarity. You'll also find guidance on emotional well-being, body changes, sexual health, relationships and setting personal goals to support your overall health.

### E. Improving your health and lifestyle

E1. Nutrition during and after treatment

E2. Physical activity and movement

E3. Reducing or avoiding alcohol

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# Overview of options

## Navigating everyday life

Cancer can affect many parts of your everyday life, from work and finances to getting around and managing daily tasks. This section provides guidance on talking to your employer, accessing financial and insurance resources and finding help with transportation, meals and other practical needs. You'll also find information on planning for the future, connecting with cancer centre services, online and community resources and getting support for emergencies or mental health.

### H. Practical life support

H1. Talking to your employer and managing work

H2. Financial and insurance resources

H3. Completing forms and paperwork

H4. Help with transportation, meals and daily tasks

### I. Resources and support

I1. Cancer centre services

I2. Online resources

I3. Community resources

I4. Emergency and mental health support

# Understanding and adjusting to your diagnosis

## A. About your diagnosis

### A1. Understanding your diagnosis

Hearing that you have cancer can feel like a lot to take in. You may feel worried, scared, confused or even relieved to finally have answers. All of these feelings are normal. At your first appointment, you may hear many new words from your healthcare team. Learning what these words mean can help you feel more in control and confident as you move forward.

#### What does your diagnosis mean?

A diagnosis is the information doctors gather about your cancer. It helps them create the best plan for your treatment and care. Your diagnosis usually includes:

- **The type of cancer:** where the cancer started in your body.
- **The stage:** how big the cancer is and if it has spread.
- **The grade:** how the cancer cells look under a microscope and how quickly they might grow.
- **The goal of treatment:** whether treatment is meant to cure the cancer or control it so you can live as well as possible.

#### Common words you may hear related to your cancer

- **Curative:** The goal of treatment is to remove the cancer completely.
- **Advanced:** The cancer has grown or spread and may not be curable.
- **Metastatic:** The cancer has spread to another part of the body.
- **Chronic:** Cancer that can be treated and managed over time, like a long-term illness.
- **Non-curable:** The cancer cannot be removed completely, but treatment can still help you feel better and live longer.
- **Remission:** When cancer can no longer be seen in tests and symptoms improve or disappear.
- **Recurrence:** When cancer comes back after treatment.
- **Palliative care:** Care that focuses on comfort, quality of life and support for symptoms at any stage of cancer.
- **End-of-life care:** Care that focuses on comfort and support in the final stage of life.

#### What a diagnosis cannot tell you

Your diagnosis gives doctors important facts, but it cannot predict everything. It cannot always tell you exactly how you will respond to treatment, how you will feel or what your future will look like. Every person's experience with cancer is unique.

## A2. Coping after diagnosis

### Common feelings after diagnosis

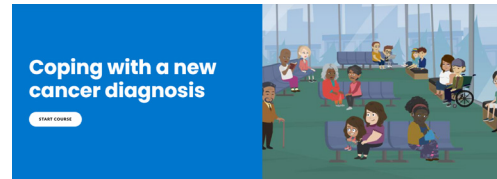
After learning your diagnosis, it is normal to feel shock, fear, sadness, anger or even relief.

Cancer Care Alberta's **Coping with a New Cancer Diagnosis** online course explains:

- what emotions are
- ideas for working through difficult emotions
- coping skills
- problem-solving skills
- how to find more support

Take the online course: [Coping with a New Cancer Diagnosis](#).

Visit [redcap.link/coping\\_cancer](https://redcap.link/coping_cancer).



### Tips for understanding and remembering information

- Bring a friend or family member to appointments.
- Write down what your doctor says or ask if you can record the conversation.
- Ask your doctor to repeat or explain words in a simpler way.
- Take breaks. Remember, you do not need to learn everything at once.

Use the free My Care Conversations app to record and prepare for your next appointment. You can listen to your recordings at home and share them with loved ones.

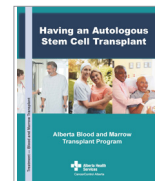
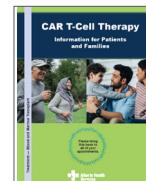
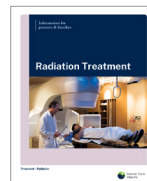
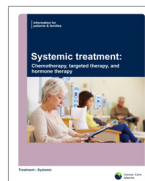


Scan the QR code or download it from the App Store or Google Play.

### For more information:

The **Newly Diagnosed with Cancer** book can help you understand more about your diagnosis, what to expect, what questions to ask and what you can do to be active in managing your cancer care. Ask for a copy at your cancer centre or view online at [bit.ly/newlydiagnosedcancer](https://bit.ly/newlydiagnosedcancer)

Once a treatment plan is made, we will give you a book that tells you more about that type of treatment.



Living your best with and beyond cancer videos—topics include physical activity, living well, brain fog, nutrition and more. Online at [bit.ly/livingyourbestvideos](https://bit.ly/livingyourbestvideos)

## B. Emotional self-care and awareness

### B1. What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness or fear that can be mild or strong. It is a normal response to stress and many people feel anxious when living with cancer. Anxiety can affect your thoughts, your body and the way you act.

#### Signs of anxiety

You might notice:

- Feeling restless, tense or on edge.
- Racing thoughts or trouble concentrating.
- Trouble falling asleep and staying asleep.
- Fast heartbeat, shortness of breath or upset stomach.
- Avoiding situations that make you nervous.

Feeling anxious at times is normal, especially during a cancer diagnosis or treatment. Anxiety becomes a problem when it starts to affect your daily life, your sleep or your ability to enjoy things you used to like.

#### Why anxiety happens

Living with cancer can bring many unknowns. It is common to worry about tests, treatments, side effects or what may happen in the future. Changes in your body, daily routine, energy or your roles at home and at work can also add stress.

Anxiety is part of the body's **fight-or-flight** response—the way your body reacts when it senses danger. In the short term, this can be helpful. For example, worrying about a new symptom may help you decide to see a doctor. But when stress lasts a long time, anxiety can feel too strong or hard to control.

Your past experiences, other health conditions and the stress in your life can also affect how anxiety shows up for you.



## B2. What is depression?

Depression is more than feeling sad or having a bad day. It is a medical condition that affects your mood, thoughts and body. People with cancer may feel depressed before, during or after treatment.

Depression can grow slowly over time or show up suddenly. Feeling depressed does not mean you are weak or not coping. It means your mind and body are under stress and may need extra support.

### Signs of depression

You may notice:

- Sadness, emptiness or hopelessness most of the time.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you usually enjoy.
- Feeling tired or low in energy.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions.
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness.

People experience depression differently. You may notice some of these signs or others not listed here.

### Why depression happens

Living with cancer can affect many parts of your life at once. Physical changes, side effects of treatment, fatigue, pain, changes in daily routines and worries about the future can all contribute to depression.

Depression can also be linked to changes in brain chemistry, reactions to medicines or other health conditions. Sometimes there is no single clear cause. Even mild depression is important to recognize and address.

Feeling down sometimes is normal, but depression lasts longer and affects your daily life. Depression can be treated and help is available. You do not need to handle it on your own.



If you are having thoughts of self-harm or ending your life, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department right away.



## B3. Coping with difficult emotions

Living with cancer can bring many different emotions. You may feel scared, angry, frustrated, sad, guilty, lonely or numb—and sometimes you may feel more than one at the same time. These emotions can change from hour to hour or day to day.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Having strong emotions does not mean you are weak or not coping. It means you are reacting to a hard and uncertain situation.

If difficult emotions last a long time or start getting in the way of your daily life, it's important to talk to your healthcare team.

Support is available through counselling, support groups or other services. You are not alone.

### Common emotional experiences

You might notice:

- Fear about the future or upcoming tests and treatments.
- Sadness or grief for changes in your health or daily life.
- Anger or frustration about being sick.
- Guilt about how cancer affects your family or loved ones.
- Worry about your cancer getting worse or coming back.

Everyone experiences emotions differently. You may feel some of these emotions or others not listed here.

### Why difficult emotions happen

Cancer can affect many parts of your life at the same time—your body, routines, roles, relationships and sense of control. It's natural to have emotional ups and downs as you face these changes.

Your emotions can also be affected by physical symptoms, tiredness, pain, medicines, sleep changes or stress. These feelings can show up at any stage—when you are diagnosed, during treatment, after treatment or while living with ongoing or advanced cancer.



## B4. Living with fear of progression or recurrence

It is very common to fear that cancer might come back (recurrence) or get worse (progression). Many people feel this way during treatment, after treatment ends or while living with ongoing cancer—even when things seem to be going well.

These worries often come and go. They may feel stronger around scan times, follow-up appointments or when you notice new aches or symptoms. Feeling this way does not mean you are doing anything wrong. It is a normal reaction to living with uncertainty.

### Signs of fear

You might notice:

- Feeling anxious or tense before appointments, scans or test results.
- Trouble sleeping or focusing.
- Worrying about new aches, pains or body changes.
- Thinking often about the future for yourself and your loved ones.
- Avoiding activities or situations that trigger worry.

Everyone experiences this fear differently. You may notice some of these signs or others not listed here.

### Why this fear happens

Living with cancer can change how safe or predictable life feels. Even after treatment ends, you may feel more aware of body sensations or health changes.

Fear of cancer getting worse or coming back can be linked to past experiences, worry about the future and the natural desire to protect yourself and your loved ones. This fear can grow stronger during times of stress, tiredness or change.

You don't have to face these fears on your own—support is always available to help you live well today while you plan for tomorrow.



## Tools to help manage anxiety, depression and difficult emotions

There are simple tools that many people find helpful for managing anxiety, depression and difficult emotions. You do not need to try everything. Even one small step can make a difference.

<b>Breathing and relaxation exercises</b>	Slow, deep breathing or gentle relaxation exercises can help calm your body and mind.
<b>Gentle movement</b>	Activities like walking or stretching can reduce tension and support your mood.
<b>Rest and sleep</b>	Taking breaks and getting enough sleep helps your mind and body recover.
<b>Talking with someone you trust</b>	Sharing worries with a friend, family member or counsellor can help you feel less alone.
<b>Writing things down</b>	Journaling can help organize your thoughts and release stress.
<b>Regular meals and hydration</b>	Eating balanced meals and drinking enough fluids can help support both physical and emotional health.
<b>Small, enjoyable or meaningful activities</b>	Hobbies, creative activities or simple daily goals can bring you a sense of purpose or accomplishment.
<b>Focusing on what you can control</b>	Healthy habits like eating well, staying active, resting and following your care plan can help you feel more empowered.
<b>Limiting distressing information</b>	Limiting time spent searching online for symptoms or reading distressing information may help lower anxiety.

## When to seek help

<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Depression</b>	<b>Difficult emotions</b>
<p>Is present most of the day, nearly every day.</p> <p>Causes panic attacks or strong physical reactions.</p> <p>Interferes with sleep, daily activities, work or relationships.</p>	<p>Lasts for two weeks or more.</p> <p>Affects daily activities, sleep or relationships.</p> <p>Makes it hard to feel hope or motivation.</p>	<p>Lasts a long time or feels overwhelming.</p> <p>Makes it hard to get through the day.</p> <p>Interferes with sleep, relationships or daily activities.</p> <p>Feels overwhelming or constant.</p> <p>Leads you to avoid activities or appointments.</p>

## B5. When and where to get help

Getting help is a sign of strength. Whether you are feeling anxious, depressed, overwhelmed or simply unsure where to turn, support is available. You do not have to wait until things feel really bad to ask for help. Many people find it helpful to reach out early.

**You and your family can access free professional support without a referral.**

### What support is available

There are different types of support to help care for your emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

- For non-urgent help:
  - Call **Health Link 811**.
  - Make an appointment with your primary care provider.

For urgent help, call:

- **911**
- **988** (Suicide Crisis Helpline)
- **1-877-303-2642**  
(Mental Health Helpline)

### Psychosocial oncology

The psychosocial oncology team:

- Is a group of trained professionals made up of different specialists, including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, spiritual health practitioners, drug access coordinators and sexual health consultants.
- Offer different supports to patients and families. Their goal is to help you manage emotional stress and help you learn ways to cope.
- Help with communication, stress, treatment side effects, mood changes, quality of life, body image concerns or feeling lonely.
- Can also connect you with other community resources if you need them.

Online at [bit.ly/ccasupportivecare](https://bit.ly/ccasupportivecare) and select Psychosocial Oncology for links and contact information. Call your cancer centre to speak with someone and find out what services are available.

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

Support groups can help you meet others who are going through similar experiences. Some groups are led by healthcare professionals, while others are led by people in the community. They may meet in-person or online. Ask your healthcare team if there are any local support groups that might be a good match for you.

### Other resources

- Help in Tough Times: Online at [bit.ly/helpin\\_toughtimes](https://bit.ly/helpin_toughtimes)

For urgent and non-urgent help and support, check out the leaflet [Supports for people with cancer](#) at your cancer centre, or visit [bit.ly/ccagettinghelp](https://bit.ly/ccagettinghelp)



Go to I3 for Community resources

# Building your circle of support

## C. Support systems and communication

### C1. Talking to family, friends and children

Telling the people you care about that you have cancer can be one of the hardest things to do. You may worry about upsetting them, not knowing what to say or how they might react. These feelings are normal and talking openly with others can help you feel supported, lower your stress and strengthen your relationships—for you and your loved ones.

#### Talking to family and friends

Being honest is important, but you don't need to share everything at once and you don't need to tell everyone who asks. Start with the information that feels most important to you. Let others ask questions and answer what you feel able to.

<b>Explain how they can help</b>	People often want to help but may not know what you need. Give them specific ideas, like driving you to appointments, making a meal, helping with chores or just listening.
<b>Set boundaries</b>	Sometimes family and friends may ask personal questions about your treatment or diagnosis that you do not feel comfortable answering. You get to decide who you want to share personal details about your cancer experience.  It's okay to say when you need space or rest. For example, "I'm tired right now. Can we talk later?" or "I'll share more when I'm ready."
<b>Expect a range of reactions</b>	Some people may cry, get quiet or seem awkward at first. Everyone reacts to news in different ways and their reaction doesn't reflect how much they care about you.
<b>Use different ways to communicate</b>	Some people may prefer writing, texting or talking on the phone instead of in-person.
<b>Share your feelings too</b>	Letting others know how you feel can help them feel more comfortable sharing their feelings.
<b>Create a support plan together</b>	Decide who can help with daily tasks, emotional support or hospital visits. This can reduce stress for everyone.
<b>Seek outside support</b>	Family counsellors, social workers or support groups can provide guidance on communicating with loved ones and children.

## Talking to children

Children can sense when something is wrong. Even young children notice changes in routines or emotions. Telling them the truth in a way they can understand can help them feel safer and more secure.

<b>Use simple, clear words</b>	For young children, say something like, "I have an illness called cancer. The doctors are helping me get better." Avoid using confusing medical terms unless they ask.
<b>Answer questions honestly</b>	Children may ask the same questions many times. Answer as truthfully as you can for their age, even if you don't have all the answers.
<b>Reassure them</b>	Remind them that cancer is not their fault and that they are still loved and cared for.
<b>Keep them involved</b>	Letting them draw pictures, help with small tasks or come to an appointment (if appropriate) can help them feel included.
<b>Watch for changes in behaviour</b>	Children may show worry through sleep changes, mood swings or changes in school performance. It's normal, but consider talking to a counsellor or a support program if concerns continue.

## KidsGrief

In some cases, it may be necessary to talk with children about death and dying.

The program KidsGrief:

- Can help you understand how children grieve and how to support them when someone in their life is dying or has died.
- Has learning modules developed by a team of experts in children's grief and by people who have experienced loss and supported children through grief.
- It is not meant to replace professional counselling or other healthcare services.
- Online at [kidsgrief.ca](http://kidsgrief.ca).

Get more tips from the leaflet [Talking with children about cancer](#) at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/cancerandchildren](http://bit.ly/cancerandchildren).



For assistance with managing difficult conversations, go online at [speaksooner.org](http://speaksooner.org).



## C2. Finding support groups and peer support

Many people who are going through cancer find it comforting to talk with others who truly understand what it's like. Support groups and peer programs give you a chance to connect, share experiences and learn new ways to cope. Hearing from others who have faced similar challenges can help you feel less alone and more hopeful.



### What are support groups?

Support groups are safe spaces where people with cancer—and sometimes their families or caregivers—can come together to talk, listen and share.

These groups can help you:

- Feel understood and less isolated.
- Express your thoughts and emotions in a safe place.
- Learn practical coping strategies and tips.
- Build friendships with people who get it.

Support groups may:

- Be led by a trained counsellor, social worker or peer facilitator.
- Be in-person or online.
- Focus on certain types of cancer, stages of treatment or topics (like coping, nutrition or grief).
- Be open to people with any type of cancer or specific to one cancer type or stage.

Some people attend regularly, while others drop in when they need extra support. There is no right way to take part. Do what works best for you.

### What is peer support?

Peer support connects you one-on-one with someone who has had cancer. This person—often called a **peer mentor** or **peer supporter**—understands many of the thoughts and emotions that can come after a diagnosis.

They may not have all the answers, but they can:

- Listen without judgment.
- Offer encouragement and understanding.
- Share what helped them cope.
- Help you feel less alone.



Go to I3 for  
Community  
resources

### C3. Spiritual health and finding meaning

Living with cancer can bring big questions about who you are, what gives your life meaning and what matters most to you. It is normal to question "Why is this happening?", "Who am I outside of this diagnosis?" or "What actually matters to me most right now?"

These thoughts are natural. Caring for your spiritual health means caring for the part of you that feels hope, peace and connection.

For some people, spiritual health comes from religion or faith. For others, it comes from nature, art, music, relationships, culture or personal values. There is no right or wrong way—it is about whatever helps you feel grounded and supported. You can support your spiritual health by:

<b>Thinking about what matters most to you</b>	Take quiet time to reflect, meditate, pray, write in a journal or engage in another mindfulness practice. Even a few minutes a day can help you reconnect with your inner strength.
<b>Spending time with people you trust</b>	Talking with friends, family or community members can bring comfort and a sense of belonging. Sharing what's on your mind can help lighten the emotional load.
<b>Enjoying nature</b>	Being outdoors—even for a short walk or sitting in the sun—can calm your mind and lift your mood.
<b>Noticing small moments of joy</b>	Practice mindfulness and gratitude. You can feel grief or frustration and still notice small moments that bring you comfort—like a kind smile, a warm meal or a favourite song. You don't have to choose one feeling over another. It is okay to feel both at the same time. Try to pause each day and appreciate these simple moments, even if it's only for a few seconds.
<b>Practising a tradition or ritual</b>	Lighting a candle, praying, creating art or following cultural or spiritual practices can bring comfort and a sense of meaning.

#### Spiritual health practitioners (SHP)

Spiritual health practitioners (SHPs) are counselling therapists who are part of your cancer care team. They support your emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being. They also help make sure your values, your life story and who you are stay at the centre of your care.

You can meet a SHP as an inpatient or outpatient to help you:

- Explore who you are beyond your cancer diagnosis.
- Cope with stress, uncertainty, grief and life changes.
- Think about medical decisions in a way that fits your values and what matters most to you.
- Find meaning, comfort and connection through family, nature, community, beliefs or faith.

Spiritual health is for everyone. It is not only about religion. You do not need to belong to a faith to meet with a spiritual health practitioner. SHPs support people of all backgrounds by focusing on what gives your life meaning, strength and hope.

For more information, check out the [Spiritual health](#) brochure available at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/ccaspiritualhealth](http://bit.ly/ccaspiritualhealth)



## C4. Cancer patient navigators

Cancer care can sometimes feel overwhelming. You may have appointments, lots of new information and different people involved in your care. A cancer patient navigator is someone who helps make things easier. They are part of your healthcare team and are here to guide, support and walk beside you through your cancer journey.

Navigators can answer questions, explain information in a way that is easy to understand and help you find resources or services. They can connect you with community supports, financial help or counselling. A navigator is someone you can go to when you are not sure who to ask for help.

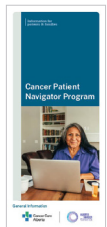
Cancer patient navigators are registered nurses with special training in cancer care. They work at community and regional cancer centres and:

- Guide patients through tests, appointments and treatments.
- Help coordinate care between your doctors and services.
- Support care as close to home as possible.
- Help you and your family before, during and after treatment.

Some navigators also work with specific communities, such as Indigenous Peoples, adolescents and young adults with cancer or people with advanced cancer. They understand the unique needs and challenges these groups may face and provide care that is culturally safe and tailored to each person.

Ask your healthcare team if a navigator is available to you. Having a navigator can make your care feel more organized, less stressful and more supported—so you can focus on your health and healing.

For more information, check out the [Cancer patient navigator](#) brochure available at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/patientnavigators](http://bit.ly/patientnavigators)



Everyone's experience with cancer is different. Some people may benefit from supports and resources that reflect their culture, identity, values, spirituality, language or life experiences. The following sections highlight some supports that may help some people feel more understood, supported and connected during their cancer experience. Your healthcare team can also help connect you with other services and community resources.

## C5. Support for LGBTQ2S+ individuals facing cancer

People in the LGBTQ2S+ community may have extra questions or concerns along the way. You deserve care that respects who you are and supports every part of your identity.

You can choose how much personal information you share with your healthcare team. Sharing details about your identity, partner or chosen family can help your team understand your needs and give you care that feels safe and inclusive.



### Common concerns

<b>Relationships and family</b>	Your partner, chosen family and close friends may be your main source of support. Ask your healthcare team how they can be included in your care.
<b>Body image and gender identity</b>	Cancer treatment can change how your body looks or feels. Let your team know your needs around gender-affirming care so they can support you respectfully.
<b>Fertility and sexual health</b>	Some cancer treatments affect fertility or sexual health. Your healthcare team can talk with you about options and connect you with specialists who understand LGBTQ2S+ needs.
<b>Safe spaces</b>	You have the right to feel safe and respected in your care. If something doesn't feel inclusive, ask any member of your healthcare team for support.

### Where to find support

- Ask your cancer centre if they have LGBTQ2S+ resources or support groups.
- Connect with community organizations that focus on LGBTQ2S+ health.
- Speak to your social worker or navigator for help finding safe and welcoming support services.

You are not alone. There are supports available that honour your identity and care about your well-being.

### Online resources

- Queering Cancer: Online at [queeringcancer.ca](http://queeringcancer.ca).
- Cancer's Margins: Online at [lgbtcancer.ca](http://lgbtcancer.ca).
- Canadian Virtual Hospice LGBTQ2S+: Online at [virtualhospice.ca/2slgbtq](http://virtualhospice.ca/2slgbtq).
- The Cancer Network: Online at [cancer-network.org](http://cancer-network.org).

## C6. Support for Indigenous Peoples facing cancer

Cancer affects everyone differently. For Indigenous Peoples, healing and care may also connect to culture, community and spirit. Indigenous Peoples across Alberta have unique traditions, languages and ways of healing. You deserve care that honours your identity, values and beliefs.

Living with cancer can affect your body, mind and spirit. Support is available to help with all parts of your well-being.



### How support can help

#### Cancer patient navigators and liaisons

- Indigenous cancer patient navigators and liaisons are available to listen, answer questions and help guide you through the healthcare system. They can connect you with cultural supports, explain medical information and be sure your voice is heard. They can also help with practical needs like travel, appointments and communication with your healthcare team.

For more information, check out the [Indigenous cancer patient navigator](#) brochure available at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/indigenousnavigator](http://bit.ly/indigenousnavigator)



#### Cultural support

- Many cancer centres can connect you with Elders, Knowledge Keepers or cultural practices such as smudging, ceremonies or prayer if you wish.

#### Family and community

- Family and community are an important part of healing. Your healthcare team can help include them in your care, if that's what you want.

#### Respecting traditions

- You have the right to ask for care that honours your culture and traditions, alongside medical treatment. Healing includes caring for your whole self and overall well-being.

### Online resources

- Cancer Care Alberta Indigenous cancer health: Online at [bit.ly/indigenoucancer](http://bit.ly/indigenoucancer).
- ACF Indigenous Cancer Care: Online at [bit.ly/acfindigenous](http://bit.ly/acfindigenous).



## C7. Support for Black Canadian, African and Caribbean individuals facing cancer

Facing cancer can feel overwhelming and it may come with unique challenges for Black Canadian, African and Caribbean people. Everyone deserves care that respects who they are, their culture and their community.

### How support can help

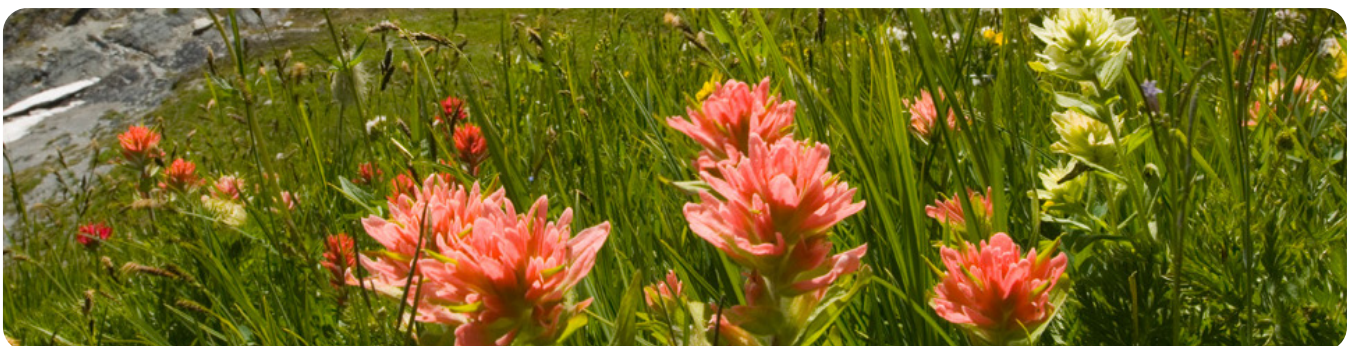
<b>Healthcare teams</b>	Your healthcare team can answer questions, guide you through the healthcare system and connect you with support and services.
<b>Cultural understanding</b>	It is important that your care respects your values, traditions and experiences. You can ask for care that takes your background into account.
<b>Building trust</b>	Some people may feel unsure about the healthcare system because of past experiences or cultural barriers. You have the right to ask questions, share your concerns and receive respectful care.
<b>Emotional and spiritual wellness</b>	Many people find strength in prayer, faith or connecting with their community. Your healthcare team can help include this in your healing if you wish.
<b>Community support</b>	Family, friends and community organizations can be strong sources of support. Many communities have groups that focus on cancer awareness, mental health and support for Black Canadians.

### Where to find support

- Ask your healthcare team to connect you with resources and support groups.
- Connect with local community or cultural organizations for support, information and programs.
- Look for peer support groups with others who share similar experiences.

### Online resources

- The Oladele Foundation: Online at [oladele.ca](http://oladele.ca).



## C8. Support for caregivers

Caring for someone with cancer can be rewarding, but it can also be tiring, stressful and emotional. Caregivers often put the needs of their loved one first and forget to take care of themselves. Looking after your own health and well-being is not selfish—it helps you be the best support you can be.

### Common challenges caregivers face

It is normal to feel overwhelmed, worried, frustrated or sad. Balancing appointments, treatments, work, family and home responsibilities can be challenging and you may sometimes feel alone or unsure where to turn.

### Taking care of yourself

Taking breaks, staying active, eating well, getting enough sleep and using simple relaxation techniques like deep breathing or meditation can help you cope. Connecting with supportive friends, family or community members can also help.

### Getting professional help

Our psychosocial oncology professionals are available to help at no cost. Community organizations offer information, support and programs to make caregiving more manageable. Respite care services can also give you short periods of rest to recharge.

You don't have to do everything alone. Asking for and accepting help is a sign of strength. By caring for yourself, you also care for the person you love.

Caregiver-Centred Care offers a list of resources to support family caregivers in healthcare. Visit [tinyurl.com/supports4u](https://tinyurl.com/supports4u)



Go to B5 for counselling and supports

<b>Caregivers Alberta</b>	Support for people who provide unpaid care for a loved one living with a disability, illness or aging. This organization offers information, support, connection, education and advocacy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call <b>1-877-453-5088</b> or online at <a href="https://caregiversalberta.ca">caregiversalberta.ca</a></li> </ul>
<b>Home care</b>	Alberta's Home Care Program supports Albertans through health promotion, treatments, rehabilitation and home support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online at <a href="https://bit.ly/home_communitycare">bit.ly/home_communitycare</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Helping someone with cancer</b>	The Canadian Cancer Society has lots of information on helping others with cancer and ways you can help yourself. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online at <a href="https://cancer.ca">cancer.ca</a> and select "Helping someone with cancer" or "Caregiver role."</li> </ul>
<b>Respite care</b>	This service gives caregivers a short period of rest or relief from their responsibilities. A respite bed is provided in the continuing care area of the facility. A person can usually stay up to 6 weeks a year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online at <a href="https://bit.ly/respite_care">bit.ly/respite_care</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Wellspring Alberta</b>	Wellspring Alberta is a community organization that offers one-to-one sessions for those diagnosed with cancer and their caregivers to meet with trained volunteers who have experience with cancer. Wellspring Alberta also hosts meetings for several support groups (see I3. Community resources).

## D. Palliative care: Improving quality of life

### D1. What palliative care can offer

Many people think palliative care is only for the very end of life, but this is not true. Palliative care helps you live as fully and comfortably as possible, no matter where you are in your cancer experience.

Palliative care focuses on helping you feel as well as you can. It supports your comfort, quality of life and well-being.

You can get palliative care at any stage of cancer—at diagnosis, during treatment or when cancer is ongoing. It works together with your regular cancer care.

Palliative care is about helping you live as fully and comfortably as possible, no matter what stage of treatment you are in.

<b>What palliative care is—and is not</b>	<p>Palliative care is not the same as end-of-life care. You can get palliative care while you are getting cancer treatment.</p> <p>Palliative care does not mean giving up. It focuses on helping you live as well as possible, for as long as possible.</p> <p>Palliative care is about more than physical symptoms. It also supports your emotional well-being, decision-making and your caregivers.</p>
<b>Who can benefit?</b>	<p>Anyone living with cancer, at any stage or age.</p> <p>People who have symptoms like pain, tiredness or shortness of breath.</p> <p>Families and caregivers who are looking for guidance and support.</p>
<b>What palliative care can do</b>	<p>Manage symptoms like pain, fatigue, nausea, shortness of breath or poor appetite.</p> <p>Reduce stress, fear and anxiety.</p> <p>Talk about what matters most to you.</p> <p>Make care plans that match your values and goals.</p> <p>Support caregivers with information, coping tools and community resources.</p> <p>Help you stay as active and comfortable as possible in daily life.</p>
<b>Who provides palliative care?</b>	<p>Your current cancer care team can help with many palliative care needs.</p> <p>Some people also work with a specialist palliative care team. These teams may include doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other healthcare professionals. They work together to support your body, mind and spirit.</p>
<b>Where and how to access it</b>	<p>Specialist palliative care can be provided in many ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Home care:</b> Palliative care services provided at home.</li> <li>• <b>Palliative care consult teams:</b> Teams that can see you in outpatient clinics, in the hospitals or at home.</li> <li>• <b>Palliative care units and hospices:</b> Places where people receive palliative care in an inpatient setting.</li> </ul> <p>You can ask your doctor, nurse or cancer patient navigator about palliative care at any time.</p>

## D2. Managing symptoms such as pain and fatigue

Pain and fatigue (tiredness) are common symptoms of cancer and its treatment. They can affect your daily activities, mood, sleep and overall well-being. Your healthcare team can help assess and manage these symptoms. Palliative care teams may also be involved when symptoms are more complex or difficult to control.


### Symptoms that may need extra support

Extra support may help with symptoms such as:

- Pain
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Poor appetite

You do not have to wait until symptoms are severe to ask for help. Managing symptoms early can help you stay more comfortable and active.

Not all of these symptoms require a referral to a specialist palliative care team. Your healthcare team will decide when extra support is needed. They will work with you to understand how these symptoms affect your daily life and what matters most to you.

<b>Manage pain</b>	<p><b>Tell your healthcare team about your pain</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe where it is, how strong it feels and what makes it better or worse.</li> <li>• Your healthcare team may suggest:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Medicines taken regularly or as needed.</li> <li>○ Non-medical strategies like heat or cold packs, gentle movement, light massage, relaxation exercises or distraction (like music or reading).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Manage fatigue</b>	<p>Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms people experience with cancer. It can have many causes, including treatment effects, pain, sleep changes, stress or nutrition concerns.</p> <p>Your healthcare team can help you manage fatigue by suggesting ways to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pace your energy and plan activities.</li> <li>• Take short rests during the day.</li> <li>• Manage sleep changes.</li> <li>• Eat well and stay hydrated.</li> <li>• Find gentle movement that supports energy.</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 10px; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>For more information, read the <a href="#">Managing cancer-related fatigue</a> booklet at your cancer centre or visit <a href="http://bit.ly/cancerfatiguebook">bit.ly/cancerfatiguebook</a></p>  </div>

### When to ask for help

Contact your healthcare team if:

- Pain suddenly worsens or changes
- Fatigue is severe or affecting your ability to do daily activities
- You notice new symptoms or side effects from medicines

Remember, it is okay to need help. Pain and fatigue are common and support is available to help you feel better and stay active.

## D3. Emotional and spiritual support

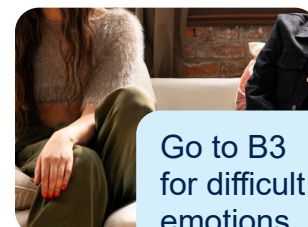
Living with cancer can bring many feelings, especially when symptoms change or the future feels uncertain. You may feel scared, sad, worried, frustrated or guilty. These feelings are normal.

Palliative care supports your emotional and spiritual well-being, along with your physical comfort. This support is for you and for the people who care about you.

### Emotional support

Palliative care teams understand that emotional distress can affect quality of life just as much as physical symptoms. Emotional support may include:

- Talking with a social worker, counsellor or other trained team member
- Support for coping with stress, worry, sadness or feeling overwhelmed
- Help for family members and caregivers who may also be struggling



Go to B3  
for difficult  
emotions

### Spiritual support

Spiritual support helps you connect with what gives your life meaning and comfort. This can include:

#### Personal reflection

- Quiet time, meditation, prayer or journaling.
- These can help bring calm and peace.

#### Meeting with spiritual health practitioners (SHPs)

- They listen, support you and help you talk about meaning, hope and worries.

#### Time in nature

- Spending time outdoors.
- This can help you feel calm and connected.

Spiritual support is for everyone. You do not need to follow a religion to receive spiritual care.

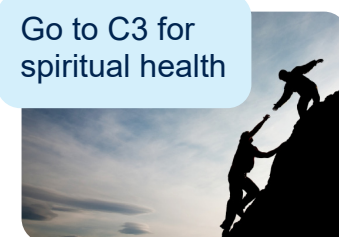
### How palliative care can help

Palliative care teams can connect you with emotional and spiritual supports. They respect your beliefs, values, culture and personal choices.

Caring for your emotional and spiritual well-being is just as important as caring for your body. It can help you feel more balanced, supported and at peace.

#### For more information:

- Online at [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca) and search **Palliative and end-of-life care**
- For palliative care that honours your culture, spirituality and traditions, go online at [livingmyculture.ca](https://livingmyculture.ca)



Go to C3 for  
spiritual health

## D4. Hoping for the best, planning for the rest

It is normal to hope for the best when you are facing cancer. Many people also find it helpful to plan ahead in case things change. Planning ahead does not mean you are giving up hope. It means you are making sure people know what you want. This can give peace of mind to you and the people who care about you.

### Getting started

Ask your healthcare team about advance care planning. You can also learn more online at [conversationsmatter.ca](http://conversationsmatter.ca).

<p><b>What is advance care planning?</b></p>	<p>Advance care planning means thinking about your future healthcare and telling others what you want. It helps your healthcare team and your loved ones understand what matters most to you.</p> <p>Anyone can do advance care planning, even if they do not have cancer or a serious illness. It is a normal way to plan for the future.</p> <p>Advance care planning is about your values, goals and choices. It helps others make decisions that match what you would want.</p> <p>You can do advance care planning at any time and you can change your plan whenever your wishes change.</p>
<p><b>What is a Green Sleeve?</b></p>	<p>A <b>Green Sleeve</b> is a folder used in Alberta to keep your advance care planning documents in one place. It holds important forms that explain your healthcare wishes.</p> <p>Many people choose to fill out a Green Sleeve as part of normal planning—not just when they are sick.</p> <p>To learn more about Green Sleeves, go online at <a href="http://bit.ly/mhagreensleeve">bit.ly/mhagreensleeve</a>.</p>
<p><b>What advance care planning includes</b></p>	<p>Advance care planning may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing a decision-maker</li> <li>• Thinking about what matters most to you</li> <li>• Writing down your wishes</li> <li>• Talking with family and your healthcare team</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why advance care planning matters</b></p>	<p>Advance care planning can help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure your care reflects your choices.</li> <li>• Reduce stress for your loved ones.</li> <li>• Help your healthcare team provide care that fits your values.</li> <li>• Give you a sense of control and peace of mind.</li> </ul> <p>It is normal to feel unsure or emotional when thinking about these topics. You do not have to do this alone.</p> <p>Social workers, cancer patient navigators and palliative care teams can help you start these conversations.</p>

Planning ahead is a gift to you and to the people who care about you. You can still focus on living fully while also making sure your wishes are known for the future.

# Nurturing your mind and body

## E. Improving your health and lifestyle

### E1. Nutrition during and after treatment

Eating well helps your body during cancer treatment and while you recover afterward. Eating well can help your body:

- Have more energy
- Keep your weight steady
- Keep muscles strong
- Fight infection
- Heal after treatment
- Handle side effects like nausea or mouth sores

Good nutrition can improve your treatment outcomes and quality of life. Many people benefit from a higher calorie and higher protein diet during treatment to support healing.

#### Eat enough so you don't lose weight

If your appetite is poor, it may help to eat smaller meals more often and have snacks between meals. It may help to eat foods that are higher in energy (calories).

#### Higher calorie foods with protein:



beef, pork, poultry, fish and eggs



milk, cheese, yoghurt and cottage cheese



beans, lentils, nuts, nut butters, seeds and tofu



protein powders, nutrition supplement drinks and soy beverages

#### Higher calorie foods:



avocado, dried fruit, granola, whipping cream, sour cream and wheat germ



margarine, butter, vegetable oil, salad dressings, mayonnaise, creamy sauces, gravy and coconut milk



sugar, syrup, jam, candy and desserts

During cancer treatment, **protein and water are very important**. Protein helps your body rebuild healthy cells and water helps flush away waste, cushions your joints and helps regulate your bowels.

## Getting more calories

- Choose full-fat milk, yoghurt or cheese
- Add butter, oil or cream to foods
- Add extra fat to:
  - Soups
  - Mashed potatoes
  - Hot cereal
  - Pasta or rice

### You can also try:

- Coconut milk in soups
- Peanut butter in hot cereal
- Butter or gravy on potatoes
- Oil or butter on pasta and rice
- Trail mix (nuts, seeds, dried fruit)

## Getting more protein

### Helps you:

- heal and recover
- meet your protein needs
- maintain strength and muscle health
- keep your immune system healthy

- Try blending soft tofu and white beans into smoothies
- Choose Greek or Icelandic (Skyr) yoghurt
- Add hummus and bean dips to sandwiches.
- Eat eggs, fish, chicken, meat, dairy, beans or lentils when you can

## Getting more fluids

Most adults need 9 to 12 cups (2 to 3 litres) of fluid each day. Fluids include:

- Water
- Milk or soy drinks
- Tea or coffee
- Broth
- Juice or pop
- Nutrition drinks like Ensure® or Boost®

- Sip fluids often, even if you are not thirsty
- Eat foods with fluid, like ice cream, smoothies, pudding, fruits and vegetables
- Carry a water bottle when you go out

## Getting more fruits, vegetables and grains

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains give your body vitamins and minerals.

- Eat different colours of fruits and vegetables
- Choose whole grains when you can
- This helps your body get what it needs to stay healthy.



If you want more information on what to eat and drink, tell your healthcare team that you would like to speak with a dietitian. A dietitian can give you guidance and tips for healthy eating during your treatment.

If you have lost weight or your appetite has changed, talk to your dietitian or nurse. For more information, visit [bit.ly/nutritionedahs](https://bit.ly/nutritionedahs) and search for the topics below.

#### **Nutrition Services patient resources:**

- [Adding calories and protein to your diet](#)
- [Adding calories and protein \(plant foods\)](#)
- [Food is sacred: Eating during cancer](#)
- [Helping you eat well in hospital](#)
- [Making smoothies with more calories and protein](#)
- [Nutrition supplements](#)
- [Nutrition and breast cancer](#)



#### **Government of Canada resources**

- [Safe food handling for immunocompromised individuals](#)

## **Managing side effects with nutrition**

Side effects during treatment are common. These may include:

- Changes in taste or smell
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Low appetite
- Feeling very tired
- Nausea or vomiting

Nutrition can help manage these side effects. Go online at [ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts](https://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts) and search Cancer for information on your side effect(s). You can also find recipes and cooking ideas, like:

- Getting enough calories and protein—recipes. Online at [ahs.ca/MoreProteinRecipes](https://ahs.ca/MoreProteinRecipes).
- The High Protein Cookbook for Muscle Health During Cancer Treatment. Online at [bit.ly/proteinduringcancer](https://bit.ly/proteinduringcancer).
- High-calorie and high-protein recipes. Online at [bit.ly/mya\\_recipes](https://bit.ly/mya_recipes)

#### **A dietitian can help you:**

- Plan meals
- Manage side effects
- Get enough calories and protein
- Answer food questions

You can also find classes for nutrition online or in-person.

- Visit [bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents](https://bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents).

## **Help with food costs**

If you are worried about having enough money for food, help is available. Learn more by searching Food insecurity online at [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://MyHealth.Alberta.ca).

## E2. Physical activity and movement

Being active during and after cancer treatment can help your body and mind. Physical activity can improve strength, energy, mood and quality of life.

Many people feel unsure about exercising while living with cancer. This is understandable. Pain, tiredness or balance problems can make movement feel harder. The good news is that safe, gentle activity is helpful for most people when done the right way.

### Benefits of physical activity

Being active can:

- Reduce tiredness (fatigue)
- Improve mood and lower stress, anxiety and depression
- Help with sleep and clear thinking (sometimes called brain fog)
- Make everyday activities easier
- Improve strength, balance and flexibility
- Lower the risk of falls
- Help support your immune system

Even small amounts of movement can help. Some activity is always better than none.

### Staying safe with activity

Some people need extra guidance before starting or changing exercise. Talk with your healthcare team if you have:

- Heart or lung problems
- Weak bones or cancer in the bones
- Balance problems or numbness
- Ongoing pain
- Poor appetite or unplanned weight loss
- Severe tiredness
- New or changing health concerns

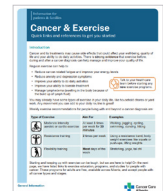
Your healthcare team can help you choose activities that are safe for you.



Talk to your healthcare team before starting any new exercise programs.




Some activity is always better than none. Listen to your body, take breaks when needed and celebrate every step toward staying active.

Get more information in the [Cancer and exercise](#) leaflet at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/ccaExercise](http://bit.ly/ccaExercise)



## Types of activity

Try to include different kinds of movement. Start slowly and build up over time.

Type of exercise	Aim for	Examples
 Moderate-intensity aerobic or cardio exercise	At least <b>3</b> times a week for <b>30 minutes</b> each time	Walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, dancing, hiking
 Resistance training	<b>2</b> times a week	Using a resistance band, body weight exercises like squats or push-ups, lifting weights
 Flexibility training	<b>Most</b> days of the week	Stretching, yoga, tai chi

Try a **community-based cancer exercise program** to help you increase your activity and exercise:

- [Alberta Cancer Exercise Program \(ACE\)](#) for Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Red Deer. Online at [bit.ly/albertacancerexercise](http://bit.ly/albertacancerexercise).
- [EXercise for Cancer to Enhance Living Well \(EXCEL\)](#) for rural and remote sites across Alberta. Online at [bit.ly/albertaexcel](http://bit.ly/albertaexcel)
- [Wellspring Alberta](#). Online at [wellspringalberta.ca](http://wellspringalberta.ca)
- [Yoga Thrive](#). Online at [bit.ly/YogaThrive](http://bit.ly/YogaThrive)

## Tips for staying active

<b>Do what you can</b>	All movement counts, even light chores or short walks.
<b>Adjust your activity</b>	Do more on days you feel stronger. Choose gentle movement on low-energy days.
<b>Break it up</b>	Short activity sessions can be easier than one long session.
<b>Move with others</b>	Being active with a friend can feel safer and more enjoyable.
<b>Prevent falls</b>	Wear supportive shoes. Use walking aids if needed. Choose activities that help with balance and strength.

## Adapting for side effects

### Fatigue:

- Choose gentle movement.
- Keep sessions short and rest often.

For more information, read the [Managing cancer-related fatigue](#) booklet at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/cancerfatiguebook](http://bit.ly/cancerfatiguebook)



### Watch cancer-related fatigue videos

7 short videos to help you understand and take steps to manage your cancer-related fatigue.

Visit [bit.ly/fatigue-videos](http://bit.ly/fatigue-videos)

### Joint pain or nerve changes

- Try low-impact activities like swimming or cycling.
- Practise simple balance exercises, such as standing near a chair.

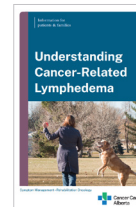
### Swelling (lymphedema):

- Follow your healthcare team's advice.
- Use compression garments if recommended.



Go to I3 for community resources

For more information, read the [Understanding cancer-related lymphedema](#) booklet at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/cca\\_lymphedema](http://bit.ly/cca_lymphedema)



## Rehabilitation oncology: Helping you move and feel better

Rehabilitation oncology supports people with cancer to move better, build strength and take part in their daily activities during and after treatment.

Rehabilitation oncology teams can include occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists and rehabilitation doctors (called physiatrists). These healthcare professionals work together to help you stay active and independent. They also help you manage functional changes caused by cancer and its treatment.

Rehabilitation oncology may help if you have:

- Weakness or stiffness
- Trouble walking or balancing
- Numbness or tingling
- Pain or long-lasting tiredness (fatigue)
- Difficulty returning to work or daily activities



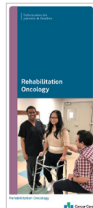
Your rehabilitation care plan may include exercises, ways to move safely, equipment, education and other support based on what you need.

Physiatrists are the rehabilitation doctors on your cancer care team. They can help manage symptoms and improve comfort, movement and daily activities. They may recommend medicines, other treatments or rehabilitation therapies with occupational therapists or physical therapists.

Ask your healthcare team about rehabilitation oncology. They can connect you with rehabilitation services. This may include a referral to the Alberta Cancer Physiatry Program or other local community-based programs.

### Online resources

For more information, check out the [Rehabilitation Oncology](#) leaflet or visit [bit.ly/rehabilitation\\_oncology](http://bit.ly/rehabilitation_oncology)



For more information, check out the [Cancer Physiatry](#) leaflet or visit [bit.ly/cca\\_physiatry](http://bit.ly/cca_physiatry)



- Find cancer-specific exercise resources online at [bit.ly/ccaExercise](http://bit.ly/ccaExercise).
- Watch three-minute movement videos for people with cancer. Online at [bit.ly/cancer-exercise](http://bit.ly/cancer-exercise).

## E3. Reducing or avoiding alcohol

Alcohol can affect your body and your cancer treatment in different ways. Drinking less—or not at all—is recommended. The Canadian Cancer Society recommends no more than two drinks a week.

One standard drink might be smaller than you realize:

- Beer - 341 mL (12 fl oz) of regular beer (5% alcohol)
- Spirits - 43 mL (1.5 fl oz) of spirits (40% alcohol)
- Wine - 142 mL (5 fl oz) of wine (12% alcohol)

Reducing or avoiding alcohol supports your recovery and lowers your risk of cancer coming back.

### Why reduce or avoid alcohol?

Reducing or avoiding alcohol can help because:

- Alcohol can weaken your immune system, making it harder for your body to fight infections.
- Alcohol can make treatment side effects like nausea, tiredness and mouth sores, worse.
- Alcohol can interfere with some cancer medicines and how well they work.
- Alcohol may increase the chance of some types of cancer coming back or new cancers developing.

### Tips to reduce or avoid alcohol

<b>Choose non-alcoholic drinks</b>	Water, juice, tea, pop, sparkling water or mocktails can replace alcoholic drinks.
<b>Find other ways to relax or socialize</b>	Go for a walk, listen to music, chat with friends or try a hobby you enjoy.
<b>Plan for social situations</b>	Hold a non-alcoholic drink in your hand or suggest activities that don't involve alcohol.
<b>Take it one step at a time</b>	Cutting back on alcohol, even a small amount, can help your body.
<b>Ask for help if you need it</b>	Some people find it hard to reduce or stop drinking, especially if they use alcohol to cope with stress or emotions. Your healthcare team can support you and connect you with counselling or community programs.

### Resources for support

- Talk to your healthcare team about local programs, peer support or counselling.
- Addiction & Mental Health: Call **1-866-322-2322** or online at [bit.ly/addictionandmentalhealth](http://bit.ly/addictionandmentalhealth).

## E4. Quitting tobacco or vapes

Quitting tobacco or vapes can be challenging and it may take several tries—but it is one of the best things you can do for your health after a cancer diagnosis. Quitting can help your body respond better to treatment, recover faster and improve your overall well-being.

### Benefits of quitting

Quitting tobacco or vapes after a cancer diagnosis can help your body heal and respond better to treatment. Benefits include:

- A better chance your treatment will work
- Fewer serious side effects
- Faster healing and recovery
- Lower chance that cancer will come back or that you will get another cancer
- A stronger immune system, which helps fight infection
- Better wound healing after surgery
- Easier breathing
- More energy
- Better sleep
- Less stress, anxiety and depression
- Less intense pain

### How quitting helps cancer treatment

<b>Radiation therapy</b>	Radiation works best when the body has enough oxygen. Smoking lowers oxygen levels, which can make radiation less effective.
<b>Chemotherapy</b>	Chemotherapy may work better in people who do not smoke. Chemicals in smoke can lower the amount of medicine in the blood.
<b>Surgery</b>	Quitting or cutting back can make surgery safer. People who quit are less likely to have problems or infections. Healing is often faster and people may go home sooner.

Every step toward better health is personal. Help is available for anyone who wants to quit or cut back.

Cancer patients who quit tobacco say they feel better physically, emotionally and have a better quality of life. Now is the best time to be tobacco free.

Many people with cancer who quit tobacco or vapes say they feel better in their bodies and emotions and are better able to get through treatment and daily life.

## Tips to help you quit

<p><b>Medicines to support quitting</b></p>	<p>Proven medicines can help reduce cravings.</p> <p>Nicotine replacement options include patches, gum, lozenges, inhalers and mouth spray.</p> <p>Other medicines that do not contain nicotine may also help.</p> <p>Ask your healthcare team which option is right for you.</p>
<p><b>Plan for cravings</b></p>	<p>Notice what makes you want to smoke or vape, such as stress, certain habits or social situations.</p> <p>Have a plan ready. Short walks, chewing gum or slow, deep breathing can help.</p>
<p><b>Manage stress</b></p>	<p>Physical activity, quiet time, talking with someone you trust or doing a hobby can help you cope without tobacco or vapes.</p>
<p><b>Get support</b></p>	<p>Counselling from your healthcare team, quitline helplines or group programs can help.</p> <p>Support from trusted coworkers, partners, friends or family can also make quitting easier.</p> <p>Having people who understand your experience and can guide you through cravings greatly improves your chances of success.</p>
<p><b>Take it one step at a time</b></p>	<p>Quitting may take multiple tries. Each attempt is progress—don't be discouraged.</p>

## Resources for support

Ask your healthcare team for local programs, counselling or medicines to help you quit safely.

**AlbertaQuits:** Online at [AlbertaQuits.ca](https://albertaquits.ca) for quitting information and support services.

- **Helpline:** Call **1-866-710-7848**. Translation services are available.
- **QuitCore Groups:** Six 90-minute sessions led by a trained facilitator, offered virtually or in-person. To register, call the helpline or go online at [AlbertaQuits.ca](https://albertaquits.ca) for upcoming programs.
- **Text support:** Text ABQUITS to 123456 to receive tips, advice and live chat support.

**Canadian Cancer Society Quit Support:** Online at [bit.ly/helptoquitsmoking](https://bit.ly/helptoquitsmoking)

**My Health Alberta:** Online at [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca). Visit the tobacco, smoking and vaping section for helpful information. You can also search the site using keywords.

## E5. Integrative oncology (Complementary therapies)

Integrative Oncology is a patient-centred, evidence-informed field of cancer care that uses complementary therapies like mind and body practices, natural products, and/or lifestyle changes along with regular cancer treatments.

Integrative oncology aims to improve health, quality of life and treatment results and supports people to take an active role in their care before, during and after their cancer treatment.

It is recommended to explore evidence-based complementary approaches to help manage symptoms and side effects. Make sure your healthcare team knows so they can help you stay safe and get the most benefit from treatment.

Psychological	Physical	Nutritional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness and spiritual practices</li> <li>• Meditation</li> <li>• Breathing and relaxation techniques</li> <li>• Art and music therapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong</li> <li>• Massage therapy</li> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Heat or cold therapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition and counselling</li> <li>• Supplements (vitamins and minerals)</li> <li>• Herbal products</li> <li>• Pre and probiotics</li> </ul>

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

Yes. Always tell your cancer care team about any complementary therapies you are using and natural products you are taking, as these can affect how your cancer treatment works. Your healthcare team needs to know to keep you safe and they may need to adjust different factors with your treatment.

Find available resources in the [Integrative and complementary therapies leaflet](#) or visit [bit.ly/ccaintegrativeoncology](http://bit.ly/ccaintegrativeoncology)



To find out more, visit [action-centre.ca](http://action-centre.ca). It has resources on:

- Nutrition classes
- Exercise, yoga and mindfulness programs
- Integrative oncology video series
- Other evidence-based resources

## E6. Cannabis use and cancer

### What is medical cannabis?

Cannabis (also called **marijuana**) is a plant. It has active chemicals that affect the brain and body. The two main ones are:

- THC—can cause a “high”
- CBD—does not usually cause a “high”

Medical cannabis means using cannabis or cannabis-based medicines to help with symptoms. Some products come from the plant (such as dried leaves or oils). Others are human-made (synthetic) products (such as nabilone or nabiximols). It is important to know how much THC and CBD are in the product you use.

### Why people use cannabis for symptoms or health concerns

Cannabis or prescription cannabinoids are not a cure for cancer. However, some people living with cancer may find using cannabis or prescription cannabinoids helps with:

- Pain
- Nausea and vomiting

Medical cannabis is not usually the first treatment tried. It may be used when other treatments do not help enough or cause too many side effects. How well it works can be different for each person.

### Safety

Cannabis is not safe for everyone. Do not use it if you:

- Have a history of mental health issues.
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Have severe liver or kidney disease.
- Have a heart problem.
- Have a weak immune system.
- Are under 25 years old.

Side effects can include sleepiness, dizziness, confusion, dry mouth, mood changes, decreased reaction time, irritability and low blood pressure. Cannabis can increase the risk of falls and accidents. Do not drive or use machines after using it.

Smoking or vaping is not recommended as it can harm your lungs and increase the risk of infections. Cannabis products can vary in strength. Always start with a very small amount and increase slowly. Using too much can cause poisoning. **Keep children and pets away from cannabis products.**

### Other medicines

Cannabis can affect other medicines, including cancer treatments, blood thinners, sedatives, medicines that cause sleepiness, antidepressants, antibiotics and alcohol.

**Always tell your healthcare team if you use cannabis or are thinking about using it, especially if you are taking other medications.**



Always talk to your healthcare team before using cannabis.

## Get cannabis safely

Medical cannabis is safest when prescribed by someone who knows your medical concerns and medications and can provide follow-up visits to monitor for side effects. Some human-made (synthetic) cannabis-based medications are available from a pharmacy with a prescription. Plant-based cannabis should only be bought from licensed producers and sellers in Canada. Do not buy cannabis from illegal sources, as these products may not be safe for use.



## Questions to ask your healthcare team

- Could cannabis help my symptoms?
- What type would be safest for me?
- How much should I use?
- What side effects should I watch for?

## For more information

Check out these resources to learn more and help guide the conversation with your healthcare team.

- Medical cannabis and cancer book: Online at [bit.ly/ccamedcannabis](https://bit.ly/ccamedcannabis)
- Medical cannabis and what patients with cancer need to know handout. Online at [bit.ly/bcmedicalcannabis](https://bit.ly/bcmedicalcannabis)
- Medical use of cannabis and cannabinoids handout: Online at [bit.ly/ccsamedicalcannabis](https://bit.ly/ccsamedicalcannabis)
- Questions about cannabis and the answers that may surprise you booklet. Online at [bit.ly/rxfilescannabis](https://bit.ly/rxfilescannabis)
- Lower-risk cannabis use: Online at [bit.ly/ahscannabis](https://bit.ly/ahscannabis)

## E7. Sleep and rest

Good sleep and rest are important for your body to heal and for you to feel your best during cancer treatment. Treatment, stress, pain or changes in routine can sometimes make it harder to get the rest you need.

### Why rest matters

- Helps your body recover and heal
- Boosts your immune system
- Improves mood and mental health
- Gives you more energy for daily activities



## Tips for better sleep and rest

<p><b>Make sleep a priority and get the benefits</b></p>	<p>Getting enough sleep helps improve physical health, like healing, digestion, emotional well-being and cognitive functioning like memory and problem-solving.</p>
<p><b>Look at your sleep environment</b></p>	<p>Get rid of noise. Fans and white noise machines can help decrease disruptions.</p> <p>Get rid of light. Use dark window coverings and remove electronics from the bedroom.</p> <p>Maintain a cool temperature.</p> <p>Use a comfortable mattress and pillow. If pain or discomfort keeps you up or wakes you up, talk to your occupational therapist about strategies.</p>
<p><b>Consider your routine</b></p>	<p>Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) in the afternoon and evening.</p> <p>Limit alcohol in the afternoon and evening.</p> <p>Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine one to two hours before bed.</p> <p>Exercise regularly during the day.</p>
<p><b>Relaxation strategies</b></p>	<p>Deep breathing, visualization, mindfulness and progressive muscle relaxation may help you sleep if your thoughts or worries keep you up.</p> <p>Schedule "worry time" during the day to problem-solve, think and plan.</p>
<p><b>Create a sleep routine</b></p>	<p>At least one hour (60 minutes) before going to bed, turn off all screens. Blue light from screens (computers, TVs, phones, tablets) can lower your melatonin production. Melatonin is a hormone that is involved with regulating sleep.</p> <p>Use your bed only for sleeping—no reading, using laptops or watching television in bed.</p> <p>Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Do this no matter how many hours of sleep you have, even on weekends.</p> <p>Open the curtains or go to a bright room after you wake up.</p> <p>Create a relaxing bedtime routine (have a bath, read a book, get ready for the next day).</p> <p>Go to bed when you are tired and feel sleepy, regardless of what time it is.</p> <p>If you are still awake after 20 minutes, get out of bed. Do something relaxing until you feel sleepy and go back to bed. Try to fall asleep again in 20 minutes.</p>

If you are often tired but still cannot sleep well or if you wake up feeling unrefreshed, let your healthcare team know. Sleep changes are common during cancer treatment and your team can help you find ways to improve your rest.

Getting enough sleep helps with healing, digestion, emotional well-being and cognitive functions like memory and problem-solving.

## F. Cognitive and mental wellness

### F1. Managing brain fog or memory changes

Brain fog is a common term used to describe changes in thinking, memory or concentration. It can feel like your mind is slower or less sharp than usual. These changes can happen during treatment, after treatment or when cancer is ongoing.

<b>How brain fog can show up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trouble concentrating or staying focused.</li> <li>Forgetting appointments, names or details.</li> <li>Feeling mentally slower or less organized.</li> <li>Difficulty multitasking.</li> <li>Taking longer to find words or make decisions.</li> <li>Everyone experiences brain fog differently. Some people notice mild changes, while others find it more disruptive.</li> </ul>
<b>Why brain fog happens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation or hormone therapy.</li> <li>Fatigue, pain or sleep changes.</li> <li>Stress, anxiety or depression.</li> <li>Some medicines.</li> <li>Changes in routine or activity levels.</li> </ul>

These factors can affect how your brain processes information. Brain fog is not a sign of intelligence loss or permanent damage.

#### Coping tools that can help

Many of the same strategies used for emotional well-being can also support clearer thinking. You do not need to try everything. Small changes can help.

<b>Pacing and simplifying tasks</b>	Do one thing at a time and allow extra time for tasks.
<b>Using reminders and supports</b>	Write things down, use calendars, alarms or notes.
<b>Rest and sleep</b>	Getting enough rest helps your brain recover.
<b>Gentle movement</b>	Light activity, such as walking or stretching, can improve focus and energy.
<b>Breathing and relaxation</b>	Calming your nervous system can help with mental clarity.

## When to seek help

Talk to your healthcare team if you have cognitive changes (changes in your thinking or memory) that:

- Are worsening.
- Interfere with daily life, work or safety.
- Do not improve over time.

Your healthcare team can check for treatable causes and connect you with supports such as psychosocial and rehabilitation services.



Go to B5 for counselling and supports

## F2. Stress, focus and mental overload



Stress can affect attention, memory and emotional balance. Living with cancer often places ongoing demands on your mind and body, which can lead to mental overload. Stress is not a personal failure. It is a natural response to ongoing demands and uncertainty.

### How stress affects mental wellness

You might notice:

- Racing thoughts
- Trouble focusing or relaxing
- Feeling mentally exhausted
- Difficulty making decisions

Relaxation techniques help to:

- Reduce feelings of anxiety and tension
- Lower fatigue
- Improve sleep
- Support your overall well-being

### Making relaxation part of your day

- Practise relaxation techniques every day, not just when you feel stressed.
- Even a few minutes can help stop stress from building up.
- Practice in the morning, before bed or at another planned time during the day.
- Choose relaxation activities you enjoy. This makes it easier to keep doing them and make them part of your routine.
- Remember—there is no "right" way to relax. What matters most is finding what helps you feel calm.
- If your stress or anxiety feels too strong or hard to manage, talk to your healthcare team. They can help connect you with counsellors, social workers or support groups.

## Relaxation techniques to try:

<b>Progressive muscle relaxation</b>	Gently tense and then relax each muscle group, starting with your toes and moving up to your head.
<b>Mindfulness or meditation</b>	Focus on the present moment. Notice your breathing, sounds or body sensations without judging them.
<b>Gentle movement</b>	Activities such as yoga, stretching or Tai Chi can help relax both your body and mind.
<b>Visualization</b>	Picture a peaceful place, such as a beach or forest, and imagine yourself there.
<b>Creative activities</b>	Drawing, listening to music or doing crafts can help shift your focus and help you unwind.

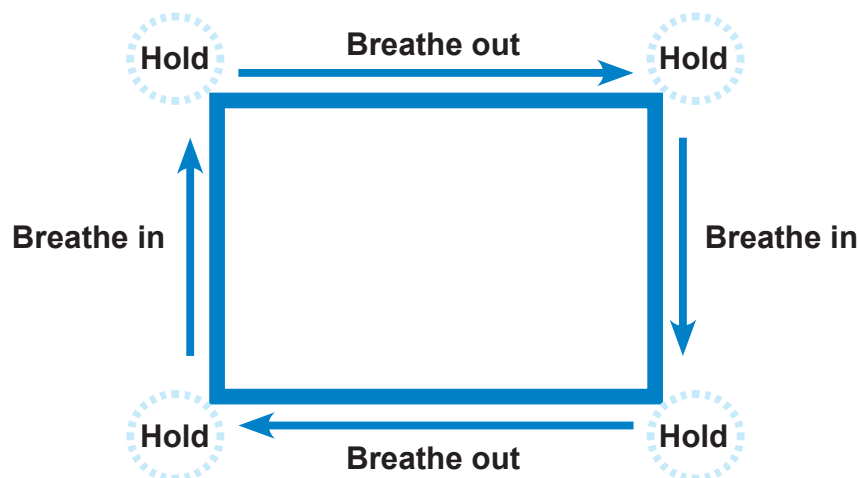
### Deep breathing (box breathing and belly breathing)

Deep breathing is a simple and effective way to relax your body and mind. Two common types are box breathing and belly (diaphragmatic) breathing. They can be used together.

How to do box breathing:

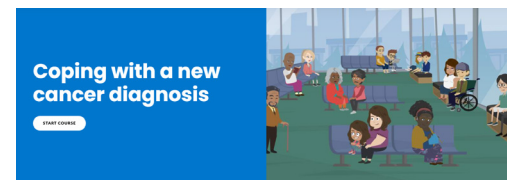
- Breathe in slowly through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of four.
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of six.
- Imagine each breath in and out as one side of a rectangle.
- Repeat this pattern several times.

This steady pattern can help slow your breathing, calm your thoughts and reduce stress.



Take the online course: [Coping with a new cancer diagnosis](#).

Visit [redcap.link/coping\\_cancer](https://redcap.link/coping_cancer)



### How to do belly (diaphragmatic) breathing

- As you breathe in, let your belly rise while keeping your chest relaxed.
- As you breathe out, let your belly fall.
- Place a hand on your belly to help you feel the movement.

Deep breathing helps calm your nervous system. It also supports lung health by keeping your lungs active, helping maintain lung volume and helping clear mucus.



### When to seek help

Ask for support if your stress:

- Feels constant or overwhelming.
- Affects sleep, concentration or mood.
- Makes daily tasks feel unmanageable.

Professional support can help you develop strategies to manage stress and protect your well-being.

Changes in thinking, focus or mental clarity are common when living with cancer. These changes are real, understandable and often temporary. Support is available and you do not have to manage this on your own.



Go to B5 for counselling and supports



## G. Emotional and personal well-being

### G1. Body image and coping with physical changes

Cancer and its treatments can cause changes to your body. These changes may be temporary or permanent and they can affect how you see yourself. You might notice changes in your weight, hair, skin or the way you move. You may also have scars or other physical differences. It is normal to have mixed feelings about these changes, like sadness, frustration or even anger.

You are more than your appearance. People who care about you value you for who you are—your kindness, humour and personality. Finding activities and relationships that bring you joy can help you feel more like yourself again.

#### Ways to cope with changes in your appearance

<b>Be kind to yourself</b>	No matter the change, you are still you. Your body is working hard to heal and recover. Focus on what your body can do rather than only how it looks.
<b>Try new styles</b>	Hats, scarves, wigs or different clothing can help you feel more confident.
<b>Talk about it</b>	Share your feelings with someone you trust, such as a friend, family member, counsellor or support group.
<b>Give yourself time</b>	Adjusting takes time—be patient with yourself.
<b>Use practical self-care</b>	Gentle exercise, skincare or relaxation techniques like mindfulness can help you feel more in control and improve well-being.
<b>Seek support</b>	Oncology social workers, psychologists or peer support groups can provide guidance, resources and encouragement.

#### Online resources

- Canadian Cancer Society: Coping with body image and self-esteem. Online at [bit.ly/ccsbodyimage](https://bit.ly/ccsbodyimage)



## G2. Sexual health and intimacy

Cancer and its treatment can affect many parts of your life, including your sexual health, desire and sense of intimacy. You might notice changes in energy levels, body image or physical comfort. Side effects such as tiredness (fatigue), pain, hormonal changes or dryness can make sexual activity feel different than it did before. Emotional stress, anxiety and changes in relationships can also affect your sexual health.

### Sexuality and intimacy changes

Sexual health affects people of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, cultures and beliefs. It can be an important part of your personal identity. Cancer and the treatments can alter your sexuality and the intimacy you have with your partner in different ways. Sexuality can mean something different for each person and can change over time.

### Ways to support your sexual health and intimacy

<b>Communicate openly</b>	Talk with your partner about how you're feeling, physically and emotionally. Honest conversations can help you both understand each other's needs and find new ways to stay connected.
<b>Take your time</b>	Intimacy does not always mean sexual activity. Simple gestures like holding hands, cuddling, sharing a meal or spending quiet time together can help maintain closeness and trust.
<b>Adapt to changes</b>	Be gentle with yourself and flexible with your approach. You might find it helpful to try different positions, use pillows for support or use lubricants or vaginal moisturizers to ease dryness and discomfort.
<b>Address discomfort or side effects</b>	If you experience pain, dryness or changes in sexual function, talk with your healthcare team. They can recommend treatments, medicines or referrals to specialists who can help.
<b>Care for your emotional well-being</b>	It is normal to experience a range of emotions during and after treatment. Counselling, either individually or with your partner, can help you adjust to changes, rebuild confidence and explore new ways of connecting.

Some cancer treatments can cause early or sudden menopause. Symptoms may include hot flashes, vaginal dryness, sleep changes, mood changes and lower interest in sex. These are common and treatable. Your healthcare team can help with safe ways to manage symptoms.

## Check out the following resources for more information:

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

- Offers support throughout the province for people with cancer and their partners who have questions or concerns about sexuality and intimacy.
- Services include one-on-one support, couples intimacy counselling and monthly health education classes.
- Online at [bit.ly/cancer-sexual-health](http://bit.ly/cancer-sexual-health).

### Canadian Cancer Society

- Provides information about sexuality and cancer.
- Online at [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca) and search for "Sexuality."

For more information, read the [Sexual health and cancer](#) brochure at your cancer centre or visit [bit.ly/ccasexualityandcancer](http://bit.ly/ccasexualityandcancer)



## G3. Dating and relationships during or after cancer

Cancer can affect how you see yourself and how you connect with others. You may wonder if people will treat you differently or if it will be hard to start or continue a relationship. These feelings are completely normal. Everyone adjusts in their own way and at their own pace.

### Changes you may notice

- Your body may look or feel different after treatment.
- You may have less energy at times.
- You might feel worried about talking about your cancer with new or current partners.

You are still you. Cancer is only one part of your life and many people find love, connection and fulfilling relationships during and after treatment.

### Tips for healthy relationships

<b>Be honest</b>	Share what feels right for you about your cancer or treatment. You don't have to tell everything at once. Go at your own pace.
<b>Take your time</b>	It is okay to move slowly when dating or deepening relationships. Give yourself space to build comfort and confidence.
<b>Communicate</b>	Talk openly with your partner about your needs, feelings and boundaries. Good communication helps you feel understood and supported.
<b>Build trust</b>	A caring partner will respect your experiences and support you without judgment.
<b>Care for yourself</b>	Focus on your own healing, comfort and self-confidence. Feeling good about yourself can make relationships stronger and more fulfilling.

## Intimacy and closeness

Intimacy may feel different during or after cancer and that's okay. You and your partner can explore new ways of being close, like gentle touch, affection, sharing activities or simply spending meaningful time together.

Couples intimacy counselling is available to cancer patients throughout the province.

- [bit.ly/ccasexualityandcancer](http://bit.ly/ccasexualityandcancer).

## Online resources

- CancerCare: Dating and new relations during and after cancer: Online at [bit.ly/dating\\_cancer](http://bit.ly/dating_cancer)
- Macmillan Cancer Support: Dating with a cancer diagnosis. Online at [bit.ly/datingwithacancerdiagnosis](http://bit.ly/datingwithacancerdiagnosis)
- This is Living with Cancer: Dating with cancer. Online at [bit.ly/canceranddating](http://bit.ly/canceranddating)

## G4. Fertility and cancer

Fertility means your ability to have children in the future. Some cancer treatments, like chemotherapy, radiation or surgery, can affect your fertility. For some people, these changes last for a while, but for others, they may be permanent.

### Things to know

- Not everyone's fertility is affected in the same way.
- Changes can depend on your age, the type of cancer and the treatment you get.
- Some treatments may make it harder or impossible to get pregnant.



If you are getting cancer treatment, **you should not become pregnant** or get your partner pregnant. If you or your partner think there may be a pregnancy, tell your healthcare team right away.

Find available resources in the **Fertility and you** booklet or visit [bit.ly/ccafertility](http://bit.ly/ccafertility)



<p><b>Options to protect fertility</b></p>	<p>Before treatment starts, your healthcare team may talk to you about ways to protect your fertility like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freezing eggs, sperm or embryos for use in the future.</li> <li>• Fertility-preserving surgeries or medicines in some cases.</li> <li>• Referrals to fertility specialists who can explain your choices.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Talking about fertility</b></p>	<p>Ask your healthcare team if your treatment might affect your fertility. If you want to have children one day, let your healthcare team know early. You can include your partner, family or a fertility expert in these talks.</p>

<b>Fertility Clinics</b>	<p><b>Calgary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Fertility Program at Cambrian Wellness Centre – West Wing (AHS)</li> <li>• Oasis Fertility Centre – 23 Sunpark Drive (Private)</li> </ul> <p><b>Edmonton</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Fertility and Women’s Endocrinology Clinic – Lois Hole Hospital for Women (AHS)</li> <li>• Alberta Reproductive Centre – ARC Centre (Private)</li> <li>• Pacific Centre for Reproductive Medicine – ATB Place (Non-AHS)</li> </ul>
<b>Online resources</b>	<p>Take Charge of Your Fertility. Online at <a href="http://mycancerfertility.org">mycancerfertility.org</a></p> <p>Canadian Cancer Society Fertility Problems. Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/ccsfertility">bit.ly/ccsfertility</a></p> <p>Before Decision Aid. Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/rethinkbreastcancerfertility">bit.ly/rethinkbreastcancerfertility</a></p> <p>Fertility and Cancer Treatment. Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/pmhfertility">bit.ly/pmhfertility</a></p> <p>Fertile Future. Online at <a href="http://fertilefuture.ca">fertilefuture.ca</a></p> <p>Pregnancy and Infant Loss Centre. Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/pilsc">bit.ly/pilsc</a></p>

## G5. Adjusting routines and setting personal goals

A cancer diagnosis can change your life and how you feel each day. Cancer and its treatments may affect your energy, mood and what you are able to do. As you move through treatment and recovery, it can help to be prepared for changes to your daily schedule and healthy habits, including how and when you take part in activities you enjoy. Adjusting your routines can help them better match your current needs and priorities.

### Tips for adjusting your routines

Adjusting your routines takes time. Pay attention to how your body feels and make changes that support your energy and well-being.

#### Listen to your body

- Notice when you feel most alert and plan more demanding tasks for those times.

#### Be flexible

- Some days you may feel able to do more and other days less—that is okay.

#### Simplify tasks

- Break bigger jobs into smaller steps or spread them over a few days.

#### Build in rest

- Include short breaks during activities to recharge.

## Setting personal goals

Setting personal goals can give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment, even during treatment. Goals do not need to be big to be meaningful.

### Using SMART goals

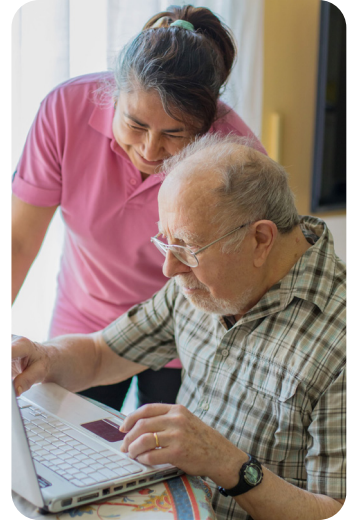
You may find it helpful to use SMART goals. This means choosing goals that are:

- **Specific**—clear and easy to understand.
- **Measurable**—you can tell when you have done them.
- **Achievable**—realistic for how you feel right now.
- **Relevant**—important to you.
- **Time-based**—tied to today, this week or another short time frame.

### Examples of simple goals

Goals can be very small, especially on low-energy days. For example:

- I will get out of bed each day.
- I will get dressed today.
- I will try to walk every day—this might be two minutes or up to 30 minutes, depending on how I feel.



### Tips for goal setting

<b>Start small</b>	Choose goals you can realistically achieve, such as walking for 10 minutes or trying one new recipe.
<b>Focus on what matters most</b>	Decide which activities bring you joy or meaning and make time for them.
<b>Celebrate progress</b>	Acknowledge what you accomplish, even if it feels small.
<b>Revisit and adjust goals</b>	Your needs and energy may change—your goals can change too.

### When goals do not go as planned

Some days you might not reach your goals because you feel tired, have side effects or feel upset. This is okay.

Planning for setbacks can help you handle them. You can remind yourself to rest, make your goal smaller or try again another day. Being gentle and kind to yourself during these times is an important part of taking care of your health.

Changing your routines does not mean you are doing less. It means you are doing what works best for you right now and supports your health and well-being.

# Navigating everyday life

## H. Practical life support

### H1. Talking to your employer and managing work

Cancer treatments can affect your work schedule, energy and ability to do certain tasks. Open communication with your employer can help you find solutions that allow you to keep working if you choose or to take time off when needed.

#### Tips for talking to your employer

<b>Plan your conversation</b>	Think about what you want to share and what adjustments you might need.
<b>Be honest but brief</b>	You can share as much or as little about your diagnosis as you feel comfortable.
<b>Focus on solutions</b>	Let your employer know what will help you continue doing your job, such as flexible hours, remote work or modified duties.
<b>Know your rights</b>	In Canada, employment laws protect you from discrimination based on illness. You may be entitled to workplace accommodations.

#### Managing work during treatment

<b>Adjust your workload</b>	Prioritize important tasks and delegate when possible.
<b>Take breaks</b>	Short rests can help you manage fatigue and stay productive.
<b>Use sick leave or disability benefits</b>	If you need time off, talk to your Human Resources department or benefits provider.
<b>Listen to your body</b>	Some days may be harder than others—it is okay to change your plans.

Your health comes first. Work is important, but finding the right balance between your job and your treatment can help you maintain both your well-being and your career.

## H2. Financial and insurance resources

Cancer treatment can bring unexpected costs—from medicines and travel to time away from work. Understanding your options for financial and insurance support can help reduce stress and let you focus on your health.

You don't need to figure this out alone. Your healthcare team can help connect you with resources and help you apply for programs.

### Possible sources of financial help

<b>Provincial health programs</b>	These programs cover most cancer treatments, but some medicines, medical supplies and home care services may have extra costs.
<b>Government benefits</b>	<p>Programs like Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefits, Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D) and provincial income assistance may be available.</p> <p>Learn more about these programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefit: Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/eisicknessbenefits">bit.ly/eisicknessbenefits</a></li> <li>• Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D): Online at <a href="http://bit.ly/cppdisabilitybenefits">bit.ly/cppdisabilitybenefits</a> and click on Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-profit organizations</b>	Some cancer organizations, charities and foundations offer grants, transportation help or other support.
<b>Social workers</b>	Social workers can help you find financial programs and assist with applications. Ask your healthcare team for a referral.

## H3. Completing Forms and Paperwork

### Disability Insurance Forms

Contact the Human Resources department at your workplace if you want to make a claim to either:

- Your work's disability insurance provider
- Service Canada (Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits)

### Need a letter from your doctor?

Make sure you:

- Tell us who the letter should be addressed to and where the letter should be sent.
- Tell us the exact dates you will be off work.

- Complete the AHS **Consent to Disclose Health Information**. You may be given it or print one yourself. You can get the form by scanning the QR Code or go online at [bit.ly/consenttodiscloseform](http://bit.ly/consenttodiscloseform)



### Tips for managing costs

- Keep a record of medical expenses—some may be tax-deductible.
- Ask your healthcare team about lower-cost medication options or programs that help with cost.
- Look into travel and lodging assistance if you need to go far for treatment.

Ask your healthcare team about speaking with a drug access coordinator if you need help with:

- the cost of medications
- understanding what medications your health benefit plan covers

For more information, read the [Cancer care drug coverage](#) brochure or visit [bit.ly/ccadrugaccess](http://bit.ly/ccadrugaccess)

## H4. Help with transportation, meals and daily tasks

Cancer treatment can make daily life more challenging. Tiredness (fatigue), side effects or medical appointments may make it hard to get around, prepare meals or complete household tasks. Support is available to help you manage these needs.

<p><b>Transportation</b></p>	<p>Some cancer centres offer patient transportation services for appointments. Some non-profit and community programs provide rides to and from treatment.</p> <p>Ask friends or family if they can carpool or drive you on treatment days.</p>
<p><b>Meals</b></p>	<p>Meal delivery programs or local charities can provide ready-to-eat or frozen meals.</p> <p>Ask friends, family or neighbors to help with cooking—even small contributions can make a big difference.</p> <p>Preparing easy, healthy meals ahead of time can save energy on busy days.</p>
<p><b>Daily tasks</b></p>	<p>Household chores like cleaning, laundry or grocery shopping can feel overwhelming.</p> <p>If possible, consider hiring help through community programs or personal services.</p> <p>Ask for assistance from friends, family or volunteers—it is okay to accept help.</p>

# I. Resources and support

## 11. Cancer centre services

Alberta has 17 cancer centres. Cancer centres offer a wide range of services to support you and your family throughout diagnosis, treatment and recovery. Knowing what's available can help you get the care, information and support you need.

- Online at [bit.ly/cancer\\_centre](https://bit.ly/cancer_centre) and select your location to learn more.

### Cancer Care Alberta

Alberta-specific information is available to support you, your family, friends and caregivers—no matter where you are in your cancer journey.

Find information, contact numbers and resources online at [cancercarealberta.ca](https://cancercarealberta.ca).

### Booklets and information

- Online at [cancercarealberta.ca](https://cancercarealberta.ca).
- Click Patients and Families, then select the type of information you want to learn more about (like Just diagnosed, In treatment, After treatment).

### Classes, groups or events

- Online at [bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents](https://bit.ly/ccaclassesandevents) to find resources, education, classes, support groups and more.
  - In between—Interactive online module for people In between getting a cancer diagnosis and your first cancer care appointment. Online at [bit.ly/CCAIInBetween](https://bit.ly/CCAIInBetween).
  - Coping with a new cancer diagnosis—Online module. Online at [bit.ly/copingwithanewdiagnosis](https://bit.ly/copingwithanewdiagnosis)

### Supportive care and living well

Psychosocial oncology, rehabilitation oncology and other wellness supports are available to you. Psychosocial oncology includes healthcare specialists who support your mental health and cancer-related concerns. They can help with communication, stress, coping with treatment side effects, mood changes, fear of progression or recurrence, quality of life, body image, sexual health issues, loneliness, financial concerns and practical supports.

- Online at [bit.ly/ccasupportivecare](https://bit.ly/ccasupportivecare) and select Psychosocial oncology for links to the various cancer centres or view the brochure.
- For information about rehabilitation oncology and other wellness supports. Online at [bit.ly/ccasupportivecare](https://bit.ly/ccasupportivecare) and select Rehabilitation oncology

### Library services

- Library Services professionals provide trusted health information through their Best Bets website. Online at [acalibrary.libguides.com](https://acalibrary.libguides.com)



## 12. Online resources

Talking to your healthcare team is a good way to get information about your diagnosis and treatment plan. If you decide to look online, start with trusted websites.

### Tips for searching online

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

- Search on trusted sites, like those mentioned in this book.
- Check if the information is current (less than five years old).
- Look for the author's credentials (like a doctor, nurse, psychologist or other healthcare professional).

Find more tips in Using the Internet to Find Information About Your Health at [bit.ly/tipsonline2](https://bit.ly/tipsonline2) (CANADA).

### Trusted websites

To learn more about the type of cancer you have and the treatment you are visit the following websites.

My Health Alberta	<a href="https://myhealth.alberta.ca">myhealth.alberta.ca</a>
Canadian Cancer Society	<a href="https://cancer.ca">cancer.ca</a>
BC Cancer Agency	<a href="https://bccancer.bc.ca">bccancer.bc.ca</a>
Canadian Cancer Survivor Network	<a href="https://survivornet.ca">survivornet.ca</a>
American Cancer Society	<a href="https://cancer.org">cancer.org</a>
Cancer's Margins	<a href="https://lgbtcancer.ca">lgbtcancer.ca</a>
Oncolink	<a href="https://oncolink.org">oncolink.org</a>

## 13. Community resources

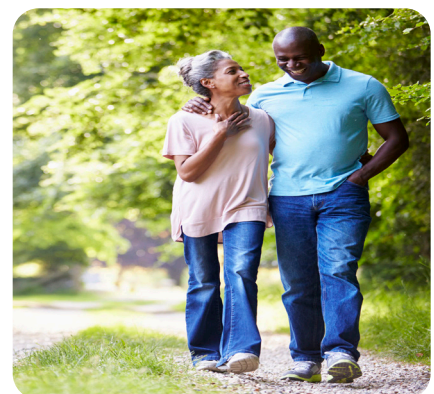
### Wellspring Alberta

Wellspring Alberta is here for people who are dealing with cancer. Whether you just found out you have cancer, are getting treatment, feeling better after treatment or helping someone with cancer.

Wellspring offers free programs to help—both online and in-person. These programs aren't medical, but they can help you feel supported, understood and more in control.

At Wellspring, you can meet others who know what you're going through. You can talk, ask questions and join activities and support groups about mental health, creativity, friendships and more. You might enjoy music, journaling, yoga, money tips or just chatting with people who get it.

- Online at [wellspringalberta.ca](https://wellspringalberta.ca) Call **1-866-682-3135**



No referral is needed for Wellspring and there's no cost to join. You can participate from anywhere in Alberta.

## Canadian Cancer Society

### Learn about the basics of cancer:

- Watch videos. Online at [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca)
- Click on Cancer Information, then select Cancer Information Videos.

### Canadian cancer Society

Online at [csl.cancer.ca/en](http://csl.cancer.ca/en).

Call **1-888-939-3333**  
(Monday to Friday).

### Cancer glossary (Word meanings)

Wondering what a cancer-related word means? Search for a word or browse a list of terms from the drop-down menu.

- Online at [cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/glossary](http://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/glossary).

### Cancer connection

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.

- Online at [cancerconnection.ca](http://cancerconnection.ca).

### Canadian Cancer Society Community Services Locator

The Canadian Cancer Society Community Services Locator (CSL) is a directory that helps cancer patients, caregivers and healthcare providers find the services they need across Canada. There are over 4000 cancer-related services listed. You can search for:

- Emotional support programs
- How to get to your cancer treatment
- Homecare
- Where to find a wig or prosthesis

### Canadian Cancer Society Wheels of Hope

The Canadian Cancer Society has volunteers who donate their time and vehicles to drive patients to and from their active cancer treatment appointments in some cities. There is a yearly registration fee for this service. Talk to your healthcare team if you would like to learn more about this service.

## Alberta 211

Alberta 211 is a local resource and information service. It provides information by phone, online or by web chat (phone service is available in many, but not all areas). They encourage local and community organizations to list their services here. This is a great place to check on what is available near you.

- Call **211** or go online at [ab.211.ca](http://ab.211.ca) to search or chat online.

Search for information on things like:

- Financial and social assistance
- Food assistance and meal programs
- Parenting and family programs
- Newcomer services
- Mental health support
- Government program assistance
- Seniors' services and home care
- Housing and utility help
- Disability support services

## 14. Emergency and mental health support

It is important to know where to turn if you experience a medical emergency or need urgent mental health support. Having this information handy can help you act quickly and get the care you need.

### Medical emergencies

Seek immediate medical attention if you experience:

- Sudden or severe pain.
- Trouble breathing.
- Heavy bleeding or bleeding that will not stop.
- High fever or signs of infection.
- Any symptom that feels life-threatening.

Keep a list of emergency numbers and mental health contacts in a visible spot at home and in your phone so you can reach help quickly if needed.

What to do: Call **911** or go to the nearest emergency department immediately.

### Mental health support

A cancer diagnosis and treatment can affect your emotional well-being. Reach out promptly if you feel:

- Overwhelming sadness or hopelessness.
- Severe anxiety or panic attacks.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others.

#### Mental health helpline (ALBERTA)

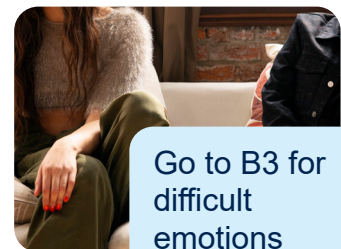
A confidential service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for mental health concerns.

- Call **1-877-303-2642**.

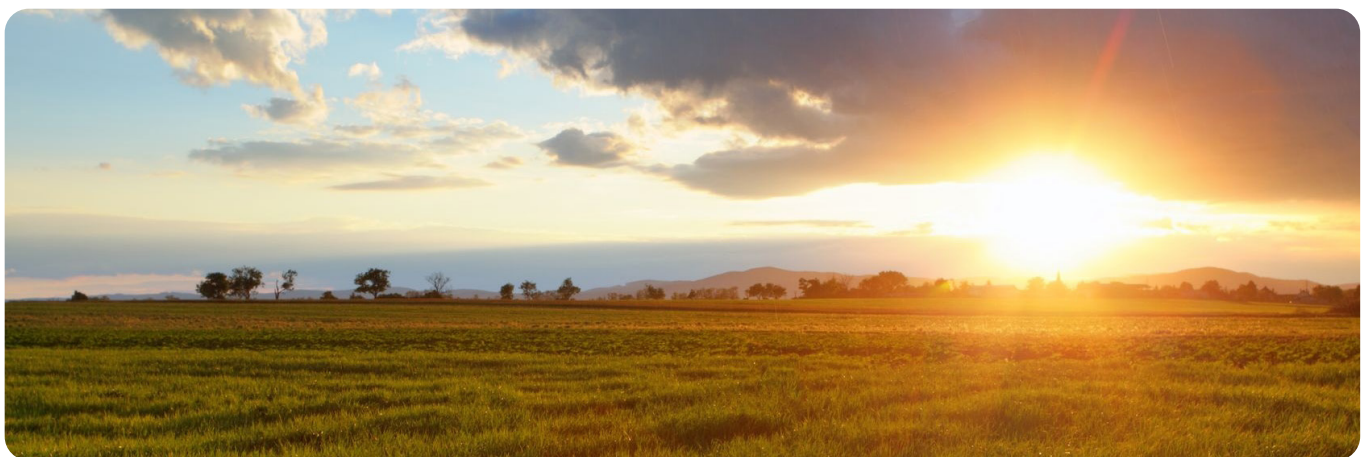
**988** – Suicide and Crisis Line: Call, text or chat 24/7 for immediate support.

Talk to your healthcare team: Nurses, doctors, social workers or psychologists can provide support.

If you have thoughts of harming yourself or others, go to the nearest emergency department.



Go to B3 for difficult emotions





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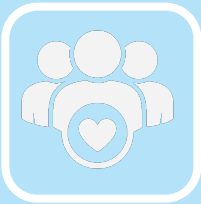
## Important things to remember



Knowledge gives you strength.



Your voice matters.



You are not alone. Living well is possible.

For other Cancer Care Alberta  
resources, visit  
[cancercarealberta.ca](https://cancercarealberta.ca)

