



*A Gynecologic Cancer fact sheet*

# survivorship: *your guide*



Cancer survivorship is about more than surviving your treatment or making the cancer go away forever. Survivorship is about living, and is something you and your treatment team should be thinking about from the time you are diagnosed, throughout your treatment and beyond. The “Your Guide” series, available on the Foundation for Women’s Cancer website, is meant to be a resource that you can discuss with your health care provider.

You are a survivor from the day you were diagnosed with cancer. This fact sheet offers some information and resources to help you stay well and healthy during your survivorship journey.

## **Staying well**

It is easy to get so caught up in the diagnosis of cancer that we forget about the rest of our bodies (and mind!). We encourage the kind of self-care during and after treatment that will promote your well-being and overall health. This is important not just to fight the cancer or prevent its return, but also to live the full life you deserve. This means taking care of your body with exercise, a healthy diet, and care to your mind and spirit.

**Exercise:** Exercise has been shown to improve health, build strength, boost immunity, reduce stress and improve fatigue. Studies have also shown that patients with cancer benefit from staying active and engaging in regular exercise even during their treatment. Experts recommend most people get 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days a week, but this may not be achievable just yet—that’s okay! The most important thing is that you choose an activity you enjoy, do it regularly, and be patient with yourself. It’s fine to start slowly and commit to ten minutes of activity a day. Your community may have activity programs specifically designed for cancer survivors, which can be a great place to start.

**Nutrition:** Your food is the fuel for your body, and a healthy diet can promote your strength and wellness and give you the energy to heal. Here are some tips for healthier eating habits:

- Fill your plate with veggies first. Fruits and vegetables are good for you. The American Cancer Society recommends five servings a day to prevent cancer.
- Whole grains are healthier than white carbs (like white bread and potatoes) and are a useful source of fiber and protein.
- Choose lean proteins. Fish and chicken are preferable to red meat. In general, only a third of your diet should be from an animal product.
- Choose water over juice or soda and limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

Talk to your doctor about how your cancer diagnosis and treatment influenced your nutritional needs and ask for a consultation with a nutritionist.

**Maintain a healthy weight:** Being overweight or obese increases the risk of cancer returning, and increases the chance of heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Remember that heart disease claims the life of 1 in 3 women in the United States. Talk to your healthcare team about what a healthy weight means for you and discuss safe and healthy ways for you to reach the goal and maintain it. A healthy diet and exercise plan are first steps toward this goal for everyone.

**Preventive health:** In addition to remembering your sunscreen and vaccines, it is important for you to stay connected with your primary care provider (PCP) after your cancer diagnosis, since your PCP is the specialist in charge of helping you with health screening, preventive care, and managing illnesses unrelated to the cancer. If you don't already have a PCP, you should establish care with one as soon as possible.

**Smoking cessation:** There are many good reasons to quit smoking. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Smoking tobacco continues to be the most common cause of lung cancer, which is the leading cause of cancer death among women. Smoking also causes cervical cancer and increases the chance of recurrent disease. And, for women undergoing treatment

for any cancer, it's important to understand that smoking increases the risk of complications related to surgery and worsens the toxicities of both chemotherapy and radiation. If you have completed your cancer treatment, congratulations! Quitting smoking now will help you feel better, heal faster, and prevent you from getting heart disease, lung disease, or another cancer. Talk to your healthcare team about setting quit date and learning about treatment options that can help you succeed.

#### **Emotional and spiritual support, stress management:**

Stress is a normal response to feeling threatened or to facing a challenge you're not sure you can meet. Receiving a cancer diagnosis is stressful! Stress can also creep into a survivor's life through the impact the treatment can have on mental health, social interactions and financial well-being. It is very common to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression during and following treatment for cancer, such as feeling sad, alone or fearful. These are examples of emotional stress. Everyone copes with these challenges differently, and we encourage you to ask your healthcare team for help, as you deserve to live a life of hope. Some things that can help mitigate stress are mental health professionals, support groups, and social engagement.

#### **Survivorship toolkit**

The Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) and Foundation for Women's Cancer (FWC) Survivorship Toolkit provides convenient resources to help you organize information about your diagnosis, treatment and long-term follow-up. You can also direct your health care provider to these resources so that they may be accurately completed and used. Use our Seek a Specialist tool to find a gynecologic oncologist in your area. The one-page Survivorship Calendar will help you keep track of your appointments after your cancer treatment.

#### **Additional resources:**

##### **NCCS Cancer Survival Toolbox®**

[canceradvocacy.org/shop/cancer-survival-toolbox-eng/](http://canceradvocacy.org/shop/cancer-survival-toolbox-eng/)

##### **American Cancer Society Survivorship: During and After Treatment**

[cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment.html](http://cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment.html)

##### **Cancer.Net Survivorship**

[cancer.net/survivorship](http://cancer.net/survivorship)



Society of Gynecologic Oncology

*The Foundation for Women's Cancer (FWC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting research, education and public awareness of gynecologic cancers.*

[foundationforwomenscancer.org](http://foundationforwomenscancer.org)

*The FWC is the official foundation of the Society of Gynecologic Oncology.*