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CANCER AWARENESS

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How cancer can affect a patient's work life

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Cancer treatment can take a physical and mental toll on patients. But as cancer survivors know, life goes on during treatment. Bills need to be paid, and those expenses will also include the added and potentially steep cost of treatment.

Many cancer patients cannot afford to take too much time off from work during treatment. Working during treatment will be different, and the following are some things patients should know as they seek to navigate a cancer diagnosis while continuing to work.

• **No two cases are the same.** The American

Cancer Society notes that whether or not a patient can work during treatment depends on an assortment of variables, including the stage of the cancer at the time of diagnosis and which treatment a health care team prescribes. A patient's overall health also will factor in. The kind of work a patient does, and whether or not a treatment schedule will align with a work schedule, also matter.

• **Work can be good for patients.** A 2019 study published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology® noted that patients diagnosed with cancer can benefit from a sense of normalcy and control if they continue to work during treatment.

Conversely, the study noted that job loss among cancer survivors has been correlated with short- and long-term financial distress. Authors of the study noted that distress has been linked to increased symptom burden. These benefits are not insignificant and should be considered as patients mull whether or not to continue working during treatment.

• **Potential side effects of treatment should be discussed with a supervisor.** The ACS notes that managing side effects of treatment while working can be challenging. For example, some chemotherapy treatments require patients to take

special precautions when using the toilet to decrease toxic waste exposure from chemo drugs. Radiation therapy also may require patients to take special measures to protect their coworkers. Patients who intend to continue working should discuss the side effects of treatment with their supervisors, who might suggest remote working or other accommodations to make things easier and safer for all involved.

• **Recovery from treatment will need to be incorporated into your schedule.** Fatigue is a common side effect of treatment, and the ACS notes the significance of recovery time after a round

of treatment. The ACS urges patients to explore remote working options on days when they receive treatment. If possible, schedule treatments late in the afternoon or right before the weekend to offer time to recover before returning to work. Recovery may necessitate rest or a nap after a round of treatment, and that can be incorporated into a work schedule to make working during treatment more manageable.

Patients who hope to continue to work while receiving cancer treatment can educate themselves about what to expect and how to work with their supervisors to make it easier to juggle their careers and

What cancer can do to the body

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When a person is diagnosed with cancer, their initial reaction may be shock. As the shock diminishes, patients may have a number of questions, including how cancer is likely to affect their body. The National Cancer Institute notes that cancer can start almost anywhere in the human body, which is perhaps one reason why the disease affects people in different ways.

Fear of the unknown can affect how patients and their families respond to a cancer diagnosis. While bodies will respond differently to cancer, the NCI notes cancer may affect a person's body in the following ways.

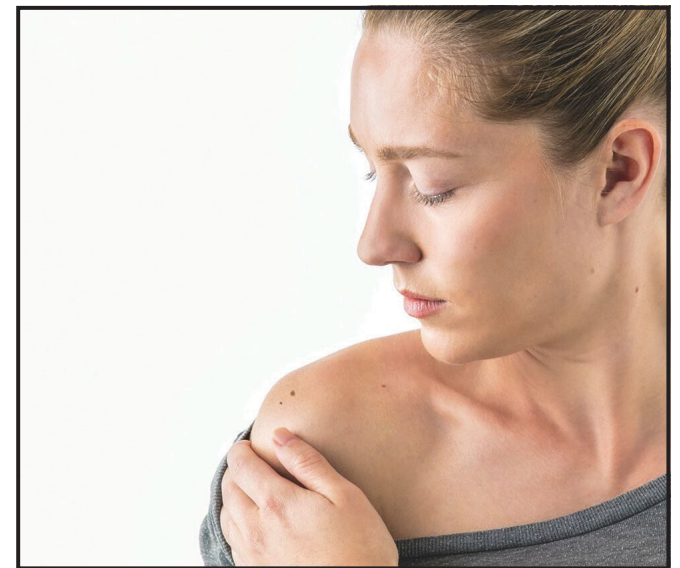
• **Breast changes:** Cancer may cause a lump or firm feeling in the breast or under the arm. Nipple changes or discharge also may occur. Skin around the breast also may redden and/or become itchy, scaly, dimpled, or puckered.

• **Bladder changes:**

Some people with cancer experience difficulties with urination, including trouble urinating and pain when urinating. Blood in the urine also is a side effect of cancer.

• **Bowel changes:** Blood in the stool and changes in bowel habits are two ways cancer affects the bowels. The Mayo Clinic notes people with cancer may alternate between diarrhea and constipation and produce a stool that is thin and pencil-like, which occurs because of a narrowed bowel passageway. A constant feeling of needing to have a bowel movement also can occur.

• **Eating problems:** Difficulty related to eating also can occur when a person has cancer. Pain after eating, trouble swallowing, belly pain, nausea and vomiting, and changes in appetite can occur. The American Cancer Society notes the body might lose its appetite, which is troubling since cancer and treatments for the disease increase



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how much energy the body needs.

• **Neurological problems:** The Barrow Neurological Institute notes the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nervous system can be affected when cancer spreads and during treatment. The NCI adds that some people may experience headaches, seizures, changes to their vision and/or hearing, and drooping of the face.

• **Skin changes:** A new mole or alterations in an existing mole may develop when a person has cancer. Some people may develop sores that do not heal. Jaundice, which is a yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes, also can occur.

Cancer can affect the body in myriad ways. Patients are urged to discuss any new side effects they experience with their health



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Breast Cancer

Each year in the United States, about 250,000 cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in women and about 2,300 in men. About 42,000 women and 510 men in the U.S. die each year from breast cancer. Black women have a higher rate of death from breast cancer than White women.

Studies have shown that your risk for breast cancer is due to a combination of factors. The main factors that influence your risk include being a woman and getting older. Most breast cancers are found in women who are 50 years old or older.

Some women will get breast cancer even without any other risk factors that they know of. Having a risk factor does not mean you will get the disease, and not all risk factors have the same effect. Most women have some risk factors, but most women do not get breast cancer. If you have breast cancer risk factors, talk with your doctor about ways you can lower your risk and about screening for breast cancer.

— Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Lesser known side effects of cancer treatment

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Health care professionals know that no two people are the same. Some may navigate a medical issue with very few side effects, while others confronting a similar situation may have a more difficult time.

When helping patients navigate a cancer diagnosis, health care professionals may note a range of side effects that are relatively common during treatment. Fatigue is one such side effect of cancer treatment that Cancer Research UK notes affects up to 90 percent of patients receiving chemotherapy, radiation,

or immunotherapy. Though many people are aware that cancer treatment can lead to fatigue, the following are some lesser known side effects that could impact patients' lives as they confront their disease.

Short-term memory issues

Cancer treatment can have a cognitive effect on patients, and that impact is common enough that it's earned a nickname. The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center notes "chemo brain" is an informal term used to describe the mental fog many cancer patients experience during treatment.

The National Cancer Institute notes chemo brain may be caused by the cancer itself or by treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, and surgery. Some anti-cancer drugs also may contribute to chemo brain, which is characterized by difficulties thinking and remembering that can arise before, during, or after treatment.

Hormonal and sexual changes

MSKCC notes that hormonal therapies for breast cancer can contribute to hot flashes, decreased interest in sex, and even

the onset of menopause. MSKCC notes the hot flashes and lack of desire to engage in sexual activity can even affect men, a consequence that is perhaps lesser known due to the discomfort men might have in discussing such issues. While MSKCC notes that women typically still have periods while receiving chemotherapy, those who do not may not have them again.

Falls

MSKCC notes chemotherapy can cause neuropathy, which is a loss of feeling or pain in the feet. The presence of neuropathy heightens the risk for falls.

Additional cancer treatments also can adversely affect balance, which further increases the risk for falls. Falls should not be taken lightly, as the World Health Organization notes they are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths across the globe. Rising slowly from sitting positions while receiving treatment and taking a loved one along to treatment can help patients reduce their risk for falls, as can accepting a wheelchair when offered.

Cancer treatment produces a number of side effects, some of which are lesser known and may surprise patients and their families.

What to do about diet while being treated for cancer

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The foods people eat can have a profound impact on their day. Foods that contain the array of vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbs, and healthy fats a body needs can provide fuel throughout the day. A diet deficient in such beneficiary ingredients can make people feel sluggish in the short-term and even compromise their long-term health.

While the hallmarks of a healthy diet do not necessarily differ for people based on age and other variables, the National Cancer Institute notes that people with cancer may need to follow diets that are a little less conventionally healthy. These dietary tips, courtesy of the NCI, can help cancer patients navigate diet during treatment.

• **Recognize you may need extra protein and calories.** Strength is a helpful ally when receiving cancer treatment, and that extra fortitude can come from diet. The NCI notes patients may need to consume some extra protein and calories to help combat the side effects of treatment. Patients, particu-



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larly people with preexisting conditions, are urged to speak with their health care teams, including their primary care physician, before making any changes to their diets. But the NCI suggests people who can might want to include more meat, fish, eggs, dairy, fats, and plant-based proteins in their diets.

• **Shop differently.** It's not only what people being treated for cancer eat that

merits a different approach, but also what they shop for and how they shop. The NCI recommends stocking up on foods that require little or no cooking. Fatigue is a common side effect of cancer treatments like chemotherapy and radiation therapy, and patients may not have the energy to prepare healthy meals each night. Stocking up on healthy fare that does not require

lots of prep and cook time can ensure patients don't resort to quick but unhealthy options at the last minute. It also can help if patients begin using shop-from-home and delivery services that are now offered by many grocery stores.

• Cook ahead of time.

It can be helpful for cancer patients to cook meals ahead of time. This ensures nutritious foods will be on

hand on treatment days, when patients may lack the energy to prepare and cook meals. Freeze meals, if necessary, so all that needs to be done come meal time is some defrosting and heating up.

• **Lean on easily digested foods.** The NCI advises patients stock up on easy-to-digest foods. Nausea is a common side effect of cancer treatments, and patients encountering nausea should prioritize foods that are easy on the stomach in an effort to alleviate such discomfort. Snacks like pretzels, saltine crackers, and tender, well-cooked vegetables are easily digested and should not exacerbate nausea. Come meal time, the NCI recommends skinless chicken or turkey that is baked or broiled, plain pasta, potatoes, and refined cold cereals.

Conventional dietary wisdom may not apply when being treated for cancer. Patients must still emphasize nutrient-rich foods, but they may need to tweak their cooking, shopping, and snacking habits to make things easier on themselves during treatment.

Kidney Cancer

Scientists have found several risk factors that could make you more likely to develop kidney cancer. They include being overweight or obese, high blood pressure, having advanced chronic kidney disease, family history of kidney cancer, long-term use of pain-relieving drugs called phenacetin, certain rare genetic diseases and prolonged contact with asbestos or cadmium. Men develop kidney cancer more often as they are more likely to be smokers and are more likely to be exposed to cancer-causing chemicals at work, which may account for some of the difference.

– National Kidney Foundation

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Possible early warning signs of cancer

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Cancer affects people from all walks of life, and health care experts anticipate a notable spike in cancer cases over the next decade. According to the World Health Organization's "Global status report on cancer 2026," new cancer diagnoses are projected to reach 35 million by 2050, which would mark an increase of 15.5 million new cases compared to 2024.

While the WHO estimates represent a significant increase in cancer cases over the next quarter century, the public is not helpless against the disease. Education, including increased awareness of early warning signs of cancer,

can increase the chances a person will survive a diagnosis. In fact, the Cancer Research InstituteTM notes the earlier a cancer is caught, the better a patient's outcome is likely to be. Early detection can be lifesaving, and these are some potential early warning signs that should be taken seriously.

• **Unexplained weight loss:** Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that a loss of 10 pounds or more may be nothing to worry about. However, unexplained weight loss sometimes is the first sign of cancer. The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute advises that weight loss when you aren't trying to lose weight increases the risk of a cancer diagnosis within the coming year.

Such weight loss has been linked to a significantly increased risk for cancers of the upper gastrointestinal tract, hematological cancers, colorectal cancer, and lung cancer.

• **Extreme fatigue:** Johns Hopkins notes that cancer uses nutrients in the body to grow and advance. When that occurs, the nutrients cannot help to replenish the body, and the result is feelings of extreme fatigue. This fatigue will be different from the tiredness a person feels at the end of a long workday or a day marked by extra physical activity.

• **Fever:** Fever is most often associated with cold and flu, so like the aforementioned potential warning signs, a fever is not

necessarily an indicator of cancer. But Cancer Research UK notes that some cancers, including non-Hodgkin lymphoma, Hodgkin lymphoma, leukemia, and kidney cancer, can cause fevers. Fevers associated with lymphoma may cause night sweats that come and go with no clear cause. Fevers that are linked to cancer typically occur at night.

• **Pain:** John Hopkins notes that persistent pain may hint at an underlying disease like cancer. This pain might occur when a cancerous mass or tumor pushes on areas of the body or the cancer releases a chemical that causes discomfort. The Mayo Clinic notes bone pain, nerve pain, and pain in the

soft tissues are common types of cancer-related pain.

• **Changes in the skin:** Skin is the largest organ in the body, so it's no surprise cancer can cause changes in the skin. Johns Hopkins notes changes in moles may be a cause for concern. A mole that is asymmetrical or has jagged edges; a mole with irregular borders; a mole that changes colors or darkens; or a mole that is large or growing should be brought to the attention of a health care professional.

Early detection of cancer can greatly improve a patient's outcome. Keeping these potential early warning signs in mind and taking them seriously should they appear is a great first step toward combatting the disease.

What can be done to reduce risk of cancer recurrence

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

No one knows what to expect upon being diagnosed with cancer. But advancements in medical research have done wonders to improve outcomes over the last half-century. The Cancer Research Institute reports that the overall five-year survival rate for all cancers reached 70 percent by the end of 2021, a substantial improvement over the 49 percent rate in the mid-1970s.

Higher survival rates should comfort cancer patients and their families. However, patients and family members may still have recurrence in the back of their minds upon the conclusion of successful treatment. In fact, the American Cancer Society notes it's common to wonder about recurrence after surviving cancer. Rates of recurrence vary by type of cancer and the stage at which the cancer was initially diagnosed. While there is no way to guarantee cancer won't

return, the ACS notes diet, physical activity, and the right lifestyle choices can be useful allies for those who want to do everything they can to reduce their risk of cancer recurrence.

Diet

The ACS advises cancer survivors to follow the same guidelines to reduce their risk for recurrence that the organization recommends to all people looking to lower their risk for cancer. The ACS notes research has suggested that the risk of breast cancer recurrence is higher in women who carry excess weight and do not incorporate many fruits or vegetables into their diets. A low-fat diet rich in fruits and vegetables is recommended to anyone looking to reduce their cancer risk, and such an approach to nutrition can be equally beneficial to survivors hoping to avoid a recurrence. Men who have had prostate cancer might be at greater risk of recurrence if they eat a lot



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of saturated fats, which are unhealthy for all people regardless of their medical histories. When attempting to use diet to reduce the risk of cancer recurrence, survivors are urged to follow the healthy eating guidelines recommended to all people.

Physical activity

The ACS reports that survivors who stay physically active typically live longer and have a lower risk of recurrence compared to survivors who do not exercise.

Physical activity also reduces a survivor's risk of developing a new form of cancer. Survivors are urged to work with their cancer care teams to develop a physical fitness routine that is safe and effective, but the ACS has its own physical activity guidelines for cancer survivors.

Those guidelines are available at <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/supportive-care/nutrition-activity-with-cancer/acs-nutrition-and-physical-activity-guideline-for-survivors>.

html.

Lifestyle choices

Poor lifestyle choices after surviving cancer can increase the risk of recurrence. Various cancers have been linked to alcohol consumption, and the ACS advises against drinking. For those who want to drink, ensure you consume no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men.

Tobacco poses another threat to cancer survivors. The ACS notes survivors who stop smoking have a lower risk of recurrence and are less likely to develop a second cancer compared to those who continue to use tobacco. The ACS also reports that studies consistently indicate that cancer patients who quit smoking survive longer than those who continue to smoke.

While there is no guaranteed way for cancer survivors to prevent the disease from returning, the right choices after a successful treatment can be a useful ally against recurrence.

Prostate Cancer

Most prostate cancers (90%) are found when the disease is in only the prostate and nearby organs. This is referred to as the local or regional stage.

The 5-year survival rate for most men with local or regional prostate cancer is nearly 100%. For men diagnosed with prostate cancer that has spread to other parts of the body, the 5-year survival rate is 31%. The 10-year survival rate for local, regional, and distant prostate cancer combined is 98%.

– *Cancer.net*

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Cancer Survivor Facts

As of January 2022, it is estimated that there are 18.1 million cancer survivors in the United States. This represents approximately 5.4% of the population. 1

The number of cancer survivors is projected to grow to 26.0 million by 2040.

Over the next decade, the number of people who have lived 5 or more years after their cancer diagnosis is projected to increase approximately 30%, to 16.3 million.

In 2022, 69% of survivors have lived 5+ years since their diagnosis; 47% of survivors have lived 10+ years since their diagnosis; and 18% of survivors have lived 20+ years since their diagnosis.

More Details About Cancer Survivors

- 67% of survivors are currently age 65 or older.
- It is estimated that by 2040, 74% of cancer survivors in the United States will be age 65 or older.
- There are 623,405 people living with metastatic breast, prostate, lung, colorectal, or bladder cancer or metastatic melanoma in the United States, and that number is expected to increase to 693,452 by the year 2025.
- Among today's survivors, the most common cancer types represented include female breast (22%, 4.1 million), prostate (20%, 3.5 million), colorectal (8%, 1.4 million), melanoma (8%, 1.5 million), and gynecologic (8%, 1.4 million).

– Cancer.gov

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