



## THRIVING AFTER THE STORM: Cancer Remission & Beyond

There are two different types of cancer remission: partial remission and complete remission. If you're in complete remission, that means your doctor didn't detect any cancer in your body. Partial remission means the amount of cancer in your body has significantly decreased. People who are in partial remission might be able to take a break from treatment, while people in full remission can stop treatment altogether.

### EMBRACING LIFE AFTER CANCER

Entering remission of any type, is generally accompanied by complex thoughts and emotions. Feelings of relief, gratitude, joy, or even excitement for the future, are commonly experienced by cancer survivors. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, you might struggle with survivor's guilt, anxiety, or depressive feelings which are no less common, yet more difficult to understand and cope with.

According to The American Cancer Society, there are a few reasons you might struggle with some of these more complex feelings:

- Having difficulty transitioning back to familial roles
- Grappling with emotions set aside during your treatment
- Worrying about the cancer returning

While undergoing cancer treatment, someone else in your family has to take on your responsibilities. After treatment ends, you might feel unneeded or even replaceable. Redefining or reclaiming your role within your family can be overwhelming—but that doesn't change the fact that you're needed and cared for by your loved ones. Talk to them about how you feel so they can help you transition back to contributing to your household.

Many people with cancer suppress their emotions while they're in treatment. Repressing feelings is a temporary solution. Pent up despair, sadness and anger will eventually come to the forefront.

A qualified and trusted therapist can help you process and




### FOLLOW THE MOUSE:

We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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sort through such complex emotions. Therapists can be an invaluable resource for helping you identify effective and therapeutic coping techniques.

 Finding a therapist is convenient with **ComPsych EAP**. Enter Web ID: **BCBSILEAP** to get access to mental healthcare and more!

### LEAVE THE WORRIES TO YOUR DOCTOR

While in remission, you may contemplate whether your new health status is merely temporary. It's a deep-seated fear many cancer survivors have because recurrence is a grave reality for many.

To the extent that you can, regulate your thoughts and concerns regarding a second cancer diagnosis. Journaling can be an effective tool for monitoring your thought patterns and a useful resource to share with your doctor. Even during remission, your doctor will remain

## 6 Long Term Cancer Treatment Side Effects

1. Hearing loss
2. Gut health issues
3. Heart problems
4. Increased cancer risk
5. Nerve damage
6. Infertility



active in your life, particularly if you experience treatment side effects.

Every cancer survivor's journey is unique. You may experience these long-term side effects or others. It is best practice to always discuss your symptoms with your healthcare provider. They can help you find suitable treatments for any side effects you may experience.

## EMBRACING A NEW NORMAL AFTER CANCER

Embracing life after cancer can feel exciting, intimidating, while simultaneously invigorating. Having a new lease on life is as miraculous and beautiful as it is onerous. Everything you might have once taken for granted is now held in a special regard. Your perspective on living a purposeful life may be of paramount importance now. Many patients in remission have a standing appointment every three to four months with their medical team for at least two years. Whereas others receive maintenance therapy to help mitigate cancer from returning.

### FIVE TECHNIQUES FOR EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL:

- 1. Adhere to your treatment plan.** Your doctor will have very specific instructions for you once you reach remission. This may include lifestyle changes, regular checkups, mental health support, maintenance therapy and more.
- 2. Set small goals.** Learning your new normal after cancer takes time. It's an adjustment for both you and your family, so it's important that you don't rush it. You might start with goals around contributing at home, getting outside more, reconnecting with friends and family, or returning to work a few hours a week. Whatever you choose, your small goals will inch you toward the loftier ones you have in mind.
- 3. Reclaim some independence.** You probably had to rely on family and friends to help care for you while you were in treatment. While you may not be ready for total independence right after treatment, you can gradually reclaim your autonomy. Try cooking a meal, doing chores, or preparing a health snack to enjoy while watching your favorite show.
- 4. Ease back into work.** Returning to work during or after cancer treatment presents unique challenges. Consult with your employer to design a plan that makes the most sense for you based on your physician's recommendations and accommodations. There may be an opportunity to gradually increase your hours over time. However, prioritize your medical appointments and fit your work schedule around ongoing treatments. Consider implementing other supportive systems to help ease you back into work, in the healthiest way possible.
- 5. Make plans for the future.** Thriving after cancer is uncharted territory. However, it's time to plan for your future again. Consider planning a family vacation, or hosting any celebratory occasion that will allow you and your loved ones to experience some much needed rest and a little frivolity. Going from survivor to thriver can be the beginning of a very beautiful new life!

You can learn more about cancer treatment side effects and remission with the resources on **BCBSIL Connect**.



SOURCES: [CancerSMOC.com](https://www.cancer-smoc.com), [Cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org), [MayoClinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org), [Cancer.gov](https://www.cancer.gov)