

## General Information



# Newly Diagnosed with Cancer or Undergoing Cancer Testing

Information and Resources to Help People Living with  
Cancer, Loved Ones, and Caregivers Be Active in their  
Cancer Care

## Being diagnosed with cancer can be life-changing.

Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka uplifts and strengthens people impacted by cancer by providing support, fostering compassionate communities, and breaking down barriers to care. Our services, including Support Groups, movement classes, social events, educational workshops and more, work as a complement to medical care.

Help and support is available - whether through a member of your care team, a family member or friend, or the resources listed in this booklet.

This booklet will provide some general information to aid in navigating the uncertainty of this time: what to expect, how to get support, and things you can do as you move forward.

## Using this book:

- Take it one step at a time - skip to sections that interest you, highlight or check off sections, and make it work for you!
- QR codes link to websites that can provide more detailed information on a variety of topics.
- If you're looking for more information, check out some of the recommended resources, or connect with a Gilda's Club staff.

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*Information within this booklet gathered from Canadian Cancer Society, Princess Margaret Hospital, Help Guide.org, American Cancer Society, Lymphoma Canada, Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Health atHome, Talk Space.com, Royal Victoria Hospital, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Alberta Health Services, Macmillian Cancer Support.*



# Section 1: Preparing Yourself

## A Cancer Care in Ontario

A wide range of cancer screening, diagnostic and treatment services is available at cancer centres, hospitals and clinics throughout Ontario. Some of these, such as sarcoma services, stem cell transplant and certain types of surgery, are focused in select locations because they require a high degree of specialization.

### Cancer Centres:

Regional cancer centres in Ontario are involved in providing cancer prevention, screening, diagnostic, treatment and related services within the province. Within each region branch is a Regional Cancer Program and Centre(s) hosted out of a hospital in that region. Often within a region, there are many partner hospitals that may also provide cancer services in partnership with the primary cancer centre. For detailed service areas for each Regional Cancer program, check out their pages on the Cancer Care Ontario website.

#### Cancer Care Ontario



<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/find-cancer-services>

#### Erie St. Clair Cancer Program

Windsor Regional Cancer Centre

Windsor Regional Cancer Centre

#### Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Regional Cancer Program

Juravinski Cancer Centre

Hamilton Health Sciences

+ Mobile Screening Coach

#### Toronto Central Regional Cancer Program

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

University Health Network

#### South East Regional Cancer Program

Cancer Centre of Southeastern Ontario

Kingston General Hospital

#### North East Regional Cancer Program

Northeast Cancer Centre

Health Sciences North/Horizon Santé-Nord

#### South West Regional Cancer Program

Verspeeten Family Cancer Centre

London Health Sciences Centre

#### Mississauga Halton Central West Regional Cancer Program

Carlo Fidani Regional Cancer Centre

Trillium Health Partners - Credit Valley Site

#### Central Regional Cancer Program

Stronach Regional Cancer Centre

Southlake Regional Health Centre

#### Champlain Regional Cancer Program

The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Program

The Ottawa Hospital

#### North West Regional Cancer Program

Regional Cancer Centre Northwest

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre

+ Mobile Screening Coach

#### Waterloo Wellington Regional Cancer Program

Grand River Regional Cancer Centre

Grand River Hospital

#### Toronto Central Regional Cancer Program

Odette Cancer Centre

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

#### Central East Regional Cancer Program

R. S. McLaughlin Durham Regional Cancer Centre

Lakeridge Health

#### Hudson Regional Cancer Program (North Simcoe Muskoka)

Hudson Regional Cancer Program

Royal Victoria Hospital

Gilda's Club is open to any Ontario residents, not just Simcoe Muskoka!

\* Sometimes, a person may be asked to come to a cancer centre to see an oncologist, surgeon, or other specialist when they have a pre-cancer diagnosis. In these cases, supports, referrals, and resources are also available.

Depending on a variety of factors a person may or may not be scheduled for an appointment at the hospital closest to them. Sometimes a person may move back and forth between hospitals depending on the specific service or treatment they need. If you have questions, talk to your doctor or clinic nurse.

Have questions about navigating or what to expect?  
Check out the Canadian Cancer Society's Information Helpline.

### **Canadian Cancer Society Information Helpline**



1-888-939-3333

## **Ontario Health atHome:**

Ontario Health at Home atHome (formerly Home and Community Care) can connect you with the care you need at home and in your community. If required, Ontario Health atHome can arrange for health care professionals to provide a range of care and supportive services to help support you at home and help you enjoy the best possible quality of life. These may include nurses, physiotherapists, social workers, registered dietitians, occupational therapists, speech therapists and personal support workers. Medical supplies and equipment, as well as specialized services for children and youth may also be available.

Ontario Health atHome also offers a Telehomecare nursing program that is designed to help people living with certain conditions achieve the best possible quality of life while learning to manage their condition, through remote monitoring and regular health coaching sessions in their own homes.

Additionally, Ontario Health at Home atHome can provide you with information about long-term care options if home care is not enough and it becomes too difficult for you to live independently at home.

Anyone can complete a referral to Ontario Health atHome – family, friends, or health care professionals.

### **Ontario Health atHome**



310-2222 (no area code required)



<https://ontariohealthathome.ca/>



# B Attending Your First Appointment

## Transportation

Depending on what cancer centre you are going to, transportation may be available. Information on local public transportation options can be found by contacting Ontario 211 or often on individual cancer centre websites. For example, in Simcoe Muskoka, additional transportation resources are provided through Red Cross, Going with Gibb, CT-Link, and more. If you will be driving yourself, Ontario 511 provides near real-time highway and traffic information to Ontario drivers to help them safely plan.

### Canadian Cancer Society Wheels of Hope Program

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. Clients need to be referred to the program by a member of their healthcare team at the hospital or cancer clinic where they are receiving treatment.

### Travel Treatment Fund

The Canadian Cancer Society's Travel Treatment Fund offers short-term financial assistance to cover some costs of travelling to cancer treatments. This includes expenses like fuel and taxi or public transit fares. It is available to people with a low income who are currently receiving cancer treatment.

#### Ontario 211



211



<https://211ontario.ca/>

#### Ontario 511



511



<https://511on.ca/>

#### Canadian Cancer Society Transportation



1-888-939-3333



[transportation@cancer.ca](mailto:transportation@cancer.ca)

## Timing

Arrive early for your appointment to give yourself time to park, navigate to the appropriate reception desk, and check-in. You will be asked to show a valid Ontario Health Card upon checking-in, though some centres have additional identification systems.

Often first appointments can take between two and four hours, as they typically involve a thorough review of your medical history, physical examination, discussion about your cancer type, potential treatment options, and may include additional testing or consultations with different members of your healthcare team. Future visits may be shorter, but it's always a good idea to allow yourself extra time.

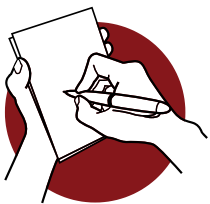
## What to Bring an Appointment

Being prepared for your appointment can help make the experience smoother and more comfortable. Review the checklist below for some common items:

- ✓ Valid Ontario Health Card
- ✓ Any private insurance information
- ✓ List of your current medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements you are taking (*\*some centres may ask you to bring all medications in their original containers*)
- ✓ Any scheduled medications you may need to take during your appointment
- ✓ List of your food or medication allergies
- ✓ The list of questions or concerns that you may have (*\*see worksheets later in this booklet for tips*)
- ✓ Something to read, listen to, or watch to help pass the time. Don't forget headphones! You may also want to download content before your appointment as Wi-Fi may be inconsistent or unavailable
- ✓ Something to drink or snack on
- ✓ Smartphone or recording device to audio record what is said during the appointment
- ✓ Paper and pen
- ✓ Support person (*there is generally space for 1 or 2 people you trust to attend with you*).

## Remembering Information

At your first appointment, you will get lots of information about your diagnosis and treatment. It can be overwhelming and hard to remember everything. It can be helpful to:



- **Take notes** during the conversation. You might want to have a notebook that you use for all your appointments. Another advantage to bringing someone you trust is it can allow you to simply listen and ask questions, while someone else takes notes. Others may prefer to have both themselves and their support person both take notes to compare afterwards.
- **Take audio recordings** of the conversation during your appointments. This allows specific wording to be captured accurately.
- **Request for a summary note** of the discussion during your appointment to be sent by your healthcare professional.

Appointments are also a perfect time to discuss any questions or concerns! See page XX for tips on what questions to ask and tracking your concerns.

## Pregnancy and Fertility

Cancer and its treatments can damage the organs or glands in your body's sexual reproductive system. This damage sometimes affects your fertility, which is your ability to get or stay pregnant or to get someone pregnant and have a child.

Problems with fertility are sometimes temporary – they may happen only during cancer treatment or for some time after treatment. But other times, fertility problems do not go away. They are or can become permanent. This is often called infertility or permanent infertility.

If fertility is important to you, try to talk about it with your healthcare team before you start cancer treatment. There are different types of fertility treatments that may help you as well as fertility specialists you may be able to be referred to.

Scan for more information:



## C Who's On Your Care Team

You are the center of your healthcare team. Doctors, nurses, and other health care providers work together with you. Often, healthcare providers will work together to create a treatment plan for you, even if they are not seeing you during appointments.

Depending on what type(s) and stage(s) your cancer is, as well as what treatment options and supports make the most sense for you, you will have different healthcare providers as a part of your team. The members may also change as your needs change.

Keeping the contact information and names of your different healthcare providers in one central place can help preserve important information. **Don't be afraid, embarrassed, or hesitant to ask questions, voice your opinion, and seek the care you need and deserve.**

## You and Your Loved Ones

You too are a member of your healthcare team. Your healthcare team works together to treat your cancer, but they also provide you with information you need to help you make treatment decisions. In addition, they provide you and your family with any support you might need before, during and after your treatment.

Hearing how you're doing and what questions and concerns you have helps provide the best care possible. If your team knows what matters to you, with each visit they can help provide support, information, and referrals.

## Cancer Doctors (Physicians)

Oncologists are doctors who have highly specialized training in cancer treatment. They often serve as the main caretakers of the cancer patient and coordinate treatments provided by both themselves and other specialists. Cancer patients often will see more than one oncologist. Each oncologist has an area in which they are an expert. The following are examples of oncologists:

- *Medical oncologist*: a doctor who is an expert in treating cancer with medications (medicines), such as chemotherapy drugs.
- *Hematologist*: a doctor who is an expert in diseases of the blood, including cancers such as lymphoma. Hematologists are also experts in treating cancer with chemotherapy.
- *Radiation oncologist*: a doctor who specializes in using radiation to treat cancer.

## Family Doctors (Physicians)

Your family physician is a very important member of your healthcare team as they are likely to know your health history better than many healthcare professionals. Between visits to the hospital you will often continue to see your family doctor who can give advice and further explanations of treatment. Your family doctor works with the rest of your healthcare team to take care of you before, during and after your cancer treatments.

Looking for a family doctor or nurse practitioner? Register for Health Care Connect and a nurse will search for a doctor or nurse practitioner who is accepting new patients in your community.

### Health Care Connect



1-800-445-1822



<https://hcc3.hcc.moh.gov.on.ca/>

## Oncology Nurses

Oncology nurses have specific training and expertise in caring for people with cancer. They provide information and support to you and your family and help you understand your cancer and its treatment. They may explain treatment options to you, give you cancer treatments, and/or help you to deal with any side effects you may experience. You may have many different nurses; however, there may be one who is your main point of contact.



## Nurse Practitioners (Advanced Practice)

Nurse practitioners are advanced practice (registered) nurses who have completed additional courses and specialized training in cancer care. They take on additional duties in diagnosis and treatment of patients and may be an important part of your cancer care team.

Advanced practice nursing is an “umbrella term” that describes nursing roles that have specialized and in-depth knowledge and skills focused on the care of people affected by cancer. You may also encounter the term “Clinical Nurse Specialist”.

## Cancer Patient Navigators

A patient navigator acts as a link and guide between you and the healthcare system. They may coordinate services and address a variety of physical, social, emotional and practical needs. They can help connect you with the right doctors and help you gain access to available therapies. A patient navigator is sometimes called a nurse navigator.

## Indigenous Cancer Patient Navigators

Indigenous navigators provide support and advocacy for First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous patients and families by facilitating and coordinating access to cancer services, addressing cultural and spiritual needs, and networking with Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to make the cancer journey as culturally safe an experience as possible.

Those with a cancer diagnosis, families and healthcare providers are welcome to call navigators directly using Cancer Care Ontario’s directory.

## Drug Access Navigator

Drug Access Navigators are a new healthcare profession to Canada. The goal of the navigator is to help take on some of the burden of getting medication from the person with the diagnosis so that they can focus on their treatment instead. This can involve:

- Help with connections and applications to different programs including:
  - Trillium Drug Program
  - Financial assistance
  - Compassionate free drugs
  - Providing free bridging drug supply while waiting for public drug coverage
  - Nursing phone support
- For those using a Private Insurance Plan, help with:
  - 3-way calls between the person with the diagnosis, Insurer and Navigator
  - Submit Prior Authorization forms
  - Request exceptions to the plan formulary
  - Submit renewals when required
  - Appeal negative decisions

### Indigenous Navigator Directory



1-855-460-2647 (Gen. Number)



<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/find-cancer-services/aboriginal-navigators>

May supportive medications may not be covered through OHIP. Without an additional drug plan, these prescriptions can be very expensive. A hospital's Drug Access Navigator can talk with drug companies to see if there are any programs that cover or share costs.

or more information, please contact the Drug Access Navigator at your cancer centre/hospital or Oncology Drug Access Navigators of Ontario (ODANO).

## **Oncology Pharmacists**

Oncology pharmacists prepare and dispense your prescription medication for your cancer treatment. The medication may be to treat your cancer (chemotherapy), or medicines to help with any side effects of your cancer treatments. Pharmacists can also help educate you about the medications, including dosage, how to take the medication, side effects and precautions.

## **Surgeons**

A surgeon is a doctor who has been trained to use surgery to treat diseases and other conditions, including cancer. A general surgeon may treat cancer in any part of the body. Other surgeons may specialize in certain areas of the body – for example, head and neck surgeons. Surgeons perform biopsy procedures, which are very important for accurate diagnosis.

Surgical oncologists are surgeons who have received specific training in removing cancerous tumours from the body. A surgeon may join your healthcare team for a period, and then take a step back after surgery is completed.

## **Pathologists**

Pathologists look at the cells that were taken from the tumour during the biopsy procedure. They examine the cells under a microscope to determine if there is cancer present, and what type of cancer it is. Hematopathologists are pathologists with a specialization in blood diseases and may also be involved in your care.

**Scan for more information  
on surgery in cancer  
treatment**



## **Radiologists**

Radiologists read and interpret x-rays and other imaging tests. Imaging and x-rays are an important part of the diagnosis procedure. Radiologists, who are sometimes called interventional radiologists, may also be involved in certain biopsy procedures that involve imaging studies. Radiologists and radiation oncologists are not the same thing!

## **Radiation Therapists**

Radiation Therapists plan your radiation treatments with the radiation doctor. They will also talk with you about what to expect during radiation treatments and manage any concerns.

**Scan for more  
information on tests  
and diagnostics**



## Dietitians

Registered dietitians are experts in food and nutrition. They help people with healthier eating patterns and lifestyles to prevent and treat chronic disease. They can give advice and help you manage any problems you may have with eating and nutrition during treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse for a referral to see a dietitian local to you.

## Rehabilitation Oncology Specialists

Cancer and cancer treatments can cause physical changes and affect how your body functions. Rehab specialists can help with conditions like lymphedema or peripheral neuropathy, as well as with everyday activities that have become difficult like dressing or eating. Rehab specialists can include:

- Physical Therapists (Physiotherapists)
- Occupational Therapists
- Speech Language Pathologists

Some cancer centres have their own rehabilitation staff while others work with specialists in the community. Talk to your cancer centre if you think a rehabilitation specialist might be helpful.

## Psychosocial Oncology Specialists

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers all provide different kinds of counselling or therapy to the individual with the diagnosis and their loved ones. They may facilitate support groups, help with coping or communication between loved ones, or provide practical resource navigation and discharge planning.

### Spiritual Care Coordinators/Providers

Spiritual Care Coordinators help people explore their beliefs, values, and emotions as they consider what gives them hope and provides comfort while living with cancer, grieving losses, and seeking meaning.

Spiritual care is not necessarily religious in nature and can be helpful to even those who are not religious. Most healthcare centres have a Prayer or Reflection room, which offer peaceful spaces for quiet reflection or meditation.

## Other Members of Your Team

Many others, such as Homeopaths, Naturopaths, Massage Therapists, and volunteers, may be a part of your personalized healthcare team. Outside organizations and programs may also complement your healthcare team. Take a look at the resources available locally to you for specifics.

# Section 2: Diagnosis & Treatment

## A Cancer Diagnosis

### The Basics of Cancer

Hearing the words “you have cancer” can be shocking and difficult. Understanding what it means for a healthcare provider to suspect you have cancer or to receive a diagnosis is essential for understanding everything else to come.

#### Suspicious test results

There are a variety of ways you might’ve first connected to a healthcare professional for testing. Perhaps through a regular screening program, such as exists for breast or colon cancer, perhaps through regularly scheduled bloodwork or other procedures, or perhaps you noticed some suspicious changes yourself and investigated. Either way, a healthcare provider noticed something that made them suspicious of cancer.

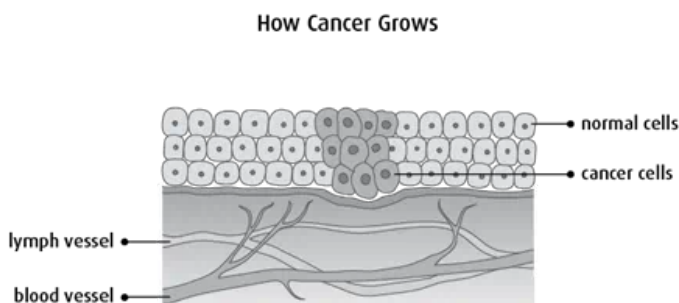
Depending on how you first connected to a healthcare provider, as well as the types of tests or suspected cancer, the process of getting a diagnosis will vary significantly.

Sometimes, if a person doesn’t meet the criteria for diagnosis, but a healthcare provider deems there to be a risk of cancer developing in the future, they may instead schedule more frequent monitoring tests.

### Diagnosis

There are many parts to a cancer diagnosis. Your doctor will tell you the:

- **Type** of cancer you have
- **Stage** of your cancer
- and in some cases the **grade** of your cancer



\*Graphic from Canadian Cancer Society

#### What is Cancer?

Cancer is a group of diseases that cause cells in the body to change and grow out of control.

Cancer can start in any place in the body when the cells grow out of control and crowd out the normal cells. This can make it difficult for the body to function.

## Type

The type of cancer is named after the part of the body where it started. If cancer has spread (**metastasized**) to a different part of your body, it is still the same type of cancer. For example, cancer that starts in the lungs but has spread to the bones is called lung cancer with bone metastases.

There are 200+ types of cancer, with even the type of cancer being different depending on the stage and grade. Some types of cancer do not use staging or grading systems (e.g. some blood cancers)

Scan for a  
video on how  
cancer  
begins and  
spreads



## Stage

Different staging systems are used for different types of cancer. For solid tumours, the TNM system is often used. This system describes the extent of cancer in the body based on tumours, lymph nodes, and metastasis. To assign the cancer stage, your doctor will determine:

- The size and location of the original tumour
- If, and how much, the cancer has spread to surrounding tissues
- Whether or not the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes
- Whether or not the cancer has spread to other parts of the body
- Other factors (e.g. age, genetic information, tumour markers)

Some cancers are not staged at all!

The stage of your cancer is determined after a series of tests. The tests may include physical examinations, imaging studies (e.g. x-rays, CT scans, PET scans, MRI scans), laboratory tests (e.g. blood, urine, etc.), pathology studies (e.g. biopsy of a small amount of tissue), or surgery.

Knowing the stage of your cancer can help your health care team choose the most effective treatment, as well as an appropriate clinical trial (if you want to participate in one).

## Grade

The grade of the cancer classifies the cancer cells based on how they look and act. A pathologist will view the cancer cells under a microscope to find out how different they appear from your normal cells, how quickly they multiply and how likely they are to spread to other parts of your body.

Different types of cancer use different grading systems. The grade of a tumour is useful for most types of cancer, but not all. Knowing the grade of your cancer helps with planning your treatment and measuring how well treatment is working.

**Low-grade:** Tumours have cells that look and act like the healthy cells around them.  
(slow growth, non aggressive)

**Medium-grade:** Mix of high-grade and low-grade tumour cells or they look and act between the extremes of high-grade and low-grade tumours.

**High-grade:** Tumour cells look very different from the healthy cells.  
(faster growth, more likely to spread)

# Risk Factors and Causes

## Risk Factors

Very few cancers have a single known cause. Most cancers seem to be caused by a mix of many risk factors, but sometimes cancer develops in people who don't have any risk factors. A risk factor is any substance or condition that increases the risk of developing cancer. Not all risk factors equally increase risk. Some common risk factors include:

- Age (*some cancer disproportionately affects younger individuals or older individuals*)
- Smoking
- Not protecting yourself from the sun
- Certain genetic changes
- Poor immune system function
- Being overweight or obese
- Diet
- Physical activity level
- Drinking alcohol
- Coming into contact with harmful chemicals at home or at work (*e.g. radon, asbestos, etc.*)
- Having certain types of infections (*e.g. HPV, HIV, Hep B or C*)

In general, the more often and the longer you are in contact with a risk factor, the greater the chance that cancer will develop. But even if a person has one or more risk factors, it is impossible to know exactly how much these factors may contribute to developing cancer later in life. Being high risk doesn't mean that cancer will develop.

Ontario Health offers a risk assessment tool online to help in identifying if you or a loved one might be a high risk for certain types of cancer.

### Ontario Health Risk Assessment



<https://www.mycanceriq.ca/Cancers/Risk>

## Genetic Factors

Some cancers have been found to have genetic links which put some individuals and families at a higher risk of developing certain cancers from the time they're born. Cancers such as ovarian, breast, colorectal, prostate, and pancreatic, just to name a few, have been found to have some gene or genetic mutation linked to them.

If you've been diagnosed with a cancer that has a genetic predisposition and have questions about the implications for your family or children, talk to your doctor about genetic testing available as well as having surgery or taking medicine to help lower your cancer risk.



## Recommended Sources of Information - General

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Canadian Cancer Society          | <a href="http://cancer.ca">cancer.ca</a>                           |
| Canadian Cancer Survivor Network | <a href="http://survivornet.ca">survivornet.ca</a>                 |
| American Cancer Society          | <a href="http://cancer.org">cancer.org</a>                         |
| Oncolink                         | <a href="http://oncolink.org">oncolink.org</a>                     |
| Cancer Care Ontario              | <a href="http://cancercareontario.ca">cancercareontario.ca</a>     |
| Ontario Health                   | <a href="http://ontariohealth.ca">ontariohealth.ca</a>             |
| Public Health Ontario            | <a href="http://publichealthontario.ca">publichealthontario.ca</a> |

## Recommended Sources of Information - Cancer Types

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Bladder Cancer Canada                 | <a href="http://bladdercancer canada.org">bladdercancer canada.org</a>                 |
| Brain Tumour Foundation               | <a href="http://braintumour.ca">braintumour.ca</a>                                     |
| Canadian Breast Network               | <a href="http://cbcn.ca">cbcn.ca</a>   |
| Canadian Skin Care Foundation         | <a href="http://canadianskincancerfoundation.com">canadianskincancerfoundation.com</a> |
| Carcinoid Neuroendocrine Canada       | <a href="http://cnetscanada.org">cnetscanada.org</a>                                   |
| Colorectal Cancer Canada              | <a href="http://coloncancer canada.ca">coloncancer canada.ca</a>                       |
| Foundation for Women's Cancer         | <a href="http://foundationforwomenscancer.org">foundationforwomenscancer.org</a>       |
| Gastric Cancer Foundation             | <a href="http://gastriccancer.org">gastriccancer.org</a>                               |
| Head and Neck Cancer Alliance         | <a href="http://headandneck.org">headandneck.org</a>                                   |
| Kidney Cancer Canada                  | <a href="http://kidneycancer canada.ca">kidneycancer canada.ca</a>                     |
| Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada | <a href="http://llscanada.org">llscanada.org</a>                                       |
| Life Beyond Lymphoma                  | <a href="http://lifebeyondlymphoma.ca">lifebeyondlymphoma.ca</a>                       |
| Lung Cancer Canada                    | <a href="http://lungcancer canada.ca">lungcancer canada.ca</a>                         |
| Melanoma Network of Canada            | <a href="http://melanomanetwork.ca">melanomanetwork.ca</a>                             |
| Myeloma Canada                        | <a href="http://myelomacanada.ca">myelomacanada.ca</a>                                 |
| Pancreatic Cancer Canada              | <a href="http://pancreaticcancer canada.ca">pancreaticcancer canada.ca</a>             |
| Prostate Cancer Canada                | <a href="http://prostatecancer.ca">prostatecancer.ca</a>                               |
| Sarcoma Cancer Foundation             | <a href="http://sarcomacancer.ca">sarcomacancer.ca</a>                                 |
| Thyroid Cancer Canada                 | <a href="http://thyroidcancer canada.org">thyroidcancer canada.org</a>                 |
| Testicular Cancer Canada              | <a href="http://testicularcancer.ngo">testicularcancer.ngo</a>                         |
| Ovarian Cancer Canada                 | <a href="http://ovariancanada.org">ovariancanada.org</a>                               |

## Questions to Ask About Your Cancer Diagnosis

Listen carefully and share **any** concerns you have with your doctors. Tell the doctor if you do not understand what they are saying and ask them to explain things in a different way. While doctors are often quite busy, understanding what's going on with your health is most important. If you're not feeling confident in speaking up or can't, bringing a trusted person with you to appointments to help advocate for your needs is a great strategy!

Prepare questions before you talk with your doctor or healthcare team member. The following are examples of some general questions:

General

**What type of my cancer do I have?**

*(There are over 80 kinds of lymphoma alone, so be sure you know exactly what type of cancer you have)*

**What is my prognosis, as you view it?**

**How will this cancer affect my life? My work? My family?**

**What changes should I expect to happen?**

*(to my appetite, appearance, energy levels, etc.)*

**What adjustments should I make to my everyday life?**

**How much experience do you have in treating my type of cancer?**

Treatments

**What are my treatment choices? What treatment do you recommend and why? Pros and cons of this treatment?**

**How does the treatment work?**

**How will you know the treatment is working?**

**What are the names of the drugs I will be given? What are they for? What do they each do?** *(side effects, long-term impact, contraindications, etc.)*

**What outcome do you hope for though treatment? Do you hope to cure or control the cancer?**

**What are the chances my treatment will be successful?**

**Is there any recent research or are there any clinical trials that I should know about?**

**How long is this treatment? What happens after?**

## Side Effects

**What are the possible risks or side effects of treatment, no matter how unlikely?** *(How serious are they?)*

**What symptoms or problems should I report right away?**

**Can the side effects be managed?**

**If I get radiation therapy, what are the long-term side effects to that area of my body?**

**If I don't feel sick, does that mean something's wrong or the treatment's not working?**

**Will my ability to conduct my daily activities be affected?**  
*(If so, how long?)*

## Practicalities of Treatment

**How often will I need to come in for treatment or test?**

*(Where will I need to go for these? Will I be able to drive myself home afterwards? How long will they take?)*

**What happens if I miss a treatment?**

**How will the treatment be given to me? Is it painful?**

**Are there special foods I should eat or not eat?**

**Is it okay to take the supplements or alternative therapies that I'm currently on at the same time?**

**What costs will I encounter?**

*(What should I do if I can't afford it?)*

**Do I get to choose the time of my treatment or is it scheduled at a set time?**

**What should I do to stay healthy and strong during treatment?**

**Who should I call if I have questions? What's the best time to call?**

## Support

**Who will manage my treatment program?**

**What resources are available to me through the treatment centre?** *(support groups, childcare, in-home visiting, etc.)*

**Where else can I go for reputable information?**

**What resources are available in the community?**

## How Much Information Should I Know?

This is a hard question, and the answer very much depends on you.

There is no perfect amount of information for every person. Each person wants to learn a different amount about their cancer and treatment. Some people like to know all of the details. Others prefer to know much less. In most cases, the amount of information you want will change over time. You might not want to know much to start with, but later on, you might want to know more.

Bring a family member or friend with you to your appointments. A family member or friend can help you recall or write down the information that you get. It can be hard to absorb all of the information on your own.

Although clinics can be very busy, your cancer care team is here to support you. To get the details that you need:

- Ask for the information that you most want to know right now.
- Know that you will have many chances to get more information. You do not have to get all the information at once.

For a good general picture of your cancer and treatment, the most important details may be:

1. Your type of cancer
2. The grade of your cancer (*what your cancer cells look like under a microscope and how fast they are growing*)
3. The stage of your cancer (*how large the cancer tumour is and how much it has spread*)
4. Whether your cancer has spread to any other parts of your body
5. What treatment your oncologist recommends for you (*for example: chemotherapy, radiation, surgery or a mix of these treatments*)



Scan for a list  
of questions  
right from  
Princess  
Margaret  
Hospital



# B Treatment Plan

## How a Treatment Plan is Made

We need many different types of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers to treat cancer. In a cancer program, we are organized into teams of many different types of care providers called multidisciplinary teams. By working together and using evidence and research, we are able to recommend the best treatment plan for you.

Once a treatment is decided on, a treatment plan can be customized for a patient's situation. This is a step-by-step process that involves both planning and scheduling.

- **Treatment planning** involves figuring out the exact doses of the treatment that will be given and how long it will last.
- **Treatment scheduling** involves working out the best timing and schedule for getting treatment.

How complicated your plan is and how difficult it is to figure out the right doses and schedule will depend on the type of treatment you're getting. Doctors follow certain guidelines when planning treatment doses and combinations of treatments. These guidelines are based on research studies that are specific to the type and stage of cancer you have and the treatment you've chosen. If you want to learn more, you can ask your doctor what guidelines are being used to help put together your treatment plan.

During a visit or a scheduled education session, your doctor and other members of the cancer care team will sit down and talk through the

treatment plan with you, your loved ones and caregivers. Some centers might offer classes for new patients, too. Many experts recommend having a written cancer treatment plan, as it acts as a roadmap of the expected path of treatment and can aid in communication. Sometimes treatment plans list who is responsible for the patient's care at different times.

Even if your treatment center does not use treatment plans or does not give you one, you can ask for as much information in writing as possible. You can refer to the written information if a problem comes up when you're at home or travelling. If you don't have a written treatment plan, you might want to ask how your health care specialists will know about your treatment plan and care. Sometimes the electronic systems can't connect or "talk" to each other. You may find that you need to ask about this, or that you need to make phone calls or send emails to be sure your treatment information is being communicated to other members of your health care team.

## Scheduling

If you don't get a written treatment plan, you can ask for a treatment schedule to be written out for you. A treatment schedule includes:

### Cancer Care Ontario Guidelines



<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/guidelines-advice>

- The type of treatment that will be given, such as radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, etc.
- How treatment will be given, such as how radiation will be delivered, or if a treatment drug will be given by mouth, injection, or infusion.
- How often treatment will be given, such as once a day, once a week, or once every 3 weeks.
- If there are breaks between cycles, courses, or types of treatment, and how long the breaks will be.
- The expected length of time for each type or course of treatment.

While treatment guidelines need to be closely followed to get the best treatment outcomes, your wishes and choices are important. Here are some things you'll want to discuss with your cancer care team if you think they might affect your treatment schedule or if you wonder about being able to finish the treatment as planned.

### Complex Case Review

Complex cases include things that might make planning your treatment more difficult. When doctors get a complex case, it can be brought to the region's Multidisciplinary Cancer

Conference (MCC) - a meeting of healthcare professionals to review individual cancer patients and make recommendations on best treatment and cancer management, keeping in mind that individual physicians are responsible for making the ultimate treatment decision. To find out more information about the MCC in your region, ask your doctor directly, or email [MCCinfo@cancercare.on.ca](mailto:MCCinfo@cancercare.on.ca).

- How soon treatment needs to start
- How much you need to stay on the planned schedule
- Your work or school schedule
- What vacation time you have available, if you need to take time off
- Spouse, partner, and family schedules
- Religious or spiritual rituals or schedules
- Transportation problems
- Travel plans you may already have
- What might happen if your treatment gets disrupted

## After a Treatment Plan is Finalized

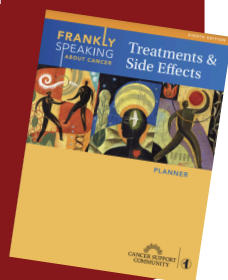
As treatment progresses, changes may be made based on how you react to medications, treatments, or other developments in your cancer. If you have any concerns or questions come up during your treatment, please write them down and share them with a member of your healthcare team. Even if scheduling an additional appointment is needed, this can often be arranged to ensure all your questions and concerns are addressed.

### Managing Concerns and Tracking Side Effects

Cancer and cancer treatments can cause you to feel unwell or experience wide range of side effects. Carefully tracking what side effects you experience and when can help your healthcare team narrow down what may be causing the effect.

Tracking your side effects and treatment changes in a dedicated planner can help with consistency.

Ask us for a free copy of the CSC planner





## Side Effects Caused By Treatment

Most side effects are specific to the treatments you receive. Your doctor should discuss before treatment what the potential side effects may be, including which ones should be reported immediately, as well as how long some side effects could linger post-treatment.

In addition to general side effects, examples of side effects associated with treatment can include:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Bladder or bowel changes (constipation/incontinence)
- Hair loss
- Mouth, throat, and dental changes
- Changes to blood (low platelets, low red blood cells, etc.)
- Skin issues
- Issues with repeated use of injection sites
- Cognitive function changes ("chemobrain")
- Lymphodema
- Nerve damage or neuropathy
- Organ damage (varies significantly by treatment)

If what you're trying is not helping manage your side effects or if you're concerned about your symptoms while on treatment, talk to your healthcare team directly.

## Things to Tell Your Team

### Pregnancy

If you think you're pregnant, talk to your doctor before you start any treatments. Certain treatments can affect pregnancy.

Some treatments can affect your ability to have biological children later on - for both men and women. Everyone who can get pregnant themselves or get another person pregnant should use some form of birth control before and during treatment to prevent pregnancy. Ask your doctor when it would be safe to try to become pregnant.

## General Side Effects

Your specific cancer will affect what side effects it may cause. Some common effects include:

- Emotional challenges and changes
- Fatigue
- Grief
- Feelings of anxiety or depression
- Effects on intimacy & sexuality
- Changes in eating and weight
- Changes in focus, memory, or attention
- Discomfort or pain
- Effects on sleep
- Organ-specific changes, such as changes in bowel habits or shortness of breath

Some effects may only appear in the long-term of after completing treatment.

Scan for  
more  
information  
on specific  
side effects

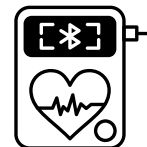


Check out some of  
the resources  
available on side  
effects online or  
in-person at  
Gilda's Club



## Medical Devices

Let your healthcare team know if you have any medical devices implemented in your body to ensure that they will not cause any problems with your treatment.



## Complimentary or Alternative Medicines

Tell your healthcare team about anything that you are taking or using. Some complementary medicine may affect your treatments. This can include:

- Pills or vitamins
- Herbal remedies and supplements
- Massage
- Hyperbaric oxygen treatment
- Injections or acupuncture
- Cannabis
- Naturopathic or homeopathic medicine



## Understanding Your Medications

It's important to know and understand all the medications, herbal supplements, inhalers, patches, over-the-counter medications, or eye/nose/ear drops you're taking. You should know:

- Why you are taking the medicine
- What it's used for
- How long you should be taking it (*e.g. you may take antibiotics for only a short time*)
- What foods or other medications to avoid while taking it (*if any*)
- How, where, and when to get refills (*if applicable*)

You can keep track of your medications and supplements in a physical worksheet, digital app, or service through your healthcare provider. Whatever method works best to keep your list up-to-date and accurate. Keep your list somewhere you can find it to take to appointments or if you need to go to the hospital (e.g. on your fridge or in your purse).

Different hospitals offer different programs to assist you with managing your medications. For example, Princess Margaret's MedCheck Program allows you to schedule a free meeting with a pharmacist to do a complete review of your medications. Connect with your local hospital to see what's available near you.

Here's a sample of the kind of worksheet you can use to track your medications:

| Medicine or Supplement Name and Purpose | Dosage and Date Started | How Many Taken and When | Reactions/Side Effects and Date |         |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|
|   |                         |                         | Reacting                        | Stopped |
|   |                         |                         |                                 |         |
|   |                         |                         |                                 |         |
|   |                         |                         |                                 |         |
|   |                         |                         |                                 |         |
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Download  
this  
worksheet  
here:



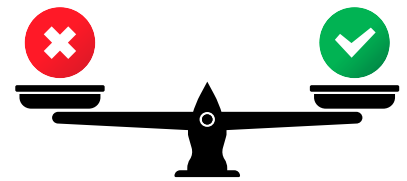
## What if I Don't Want Treatment or Want to Delay Treatment?

Not everyone diagnosed with cancer decides to get treatment or to be treated right away. That is always a choice, but make sure you understand why you are thinking about not getting treatment or delaying.

It's normal to feel anxious and overwhelmed by the amount of information you've been given. Make sure you get answers to all your questions, so you understand what is likely to happen if you put off treatment or decide not to get treatment.

You have the right to refuse medical treatment, even if it might be life-saving. You can also decide at any time to stop some or all of the treatment you already receive.

**Think about what's important to you.** You are the one having treatment, so you need to be comfortable with what you decide. Family and friends may give you a lot of information, advice and suggestions on what treatment you should choose. Don't feel pressured to make a choice that doesn't reflect what's important to you. You may want to look at the pros and cons while thinking about what is most important to you.



- Do you want a shorter treatment, because you want to get back to your routines as quickly as possible?
- Which side effects concern you most?
- Are you willing to accept one long-term side effect over another?
- Does one treatment give you more peace of mind around the cancer not returning?
- How do you feel about having to travel for treatment?

There is no way of knowing what will happen in the future. If your situation changes, you may have to make different decisions about your treatment. There is a chance that cancer may come back after the treatment you chose, but this doesn't mean you made the wrong choice. It may have come back even if you had made a different treatment choice.



Scan for an  
example of a  
decision-making  
worksheet from  
BC Cancer



# Section 3: Managing Your Wellbeing

Your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social wellbeing are all related and impact one another. Taking action on any one of these areas may have positive effects on the others and help as you go through cancer and cancer treatment. For example, being more active or more social can help you feel less tired.

## A Being Active in Your Care

### Patient Rights - What to Expect From Your Team

Within the healthcare system, each hospital will outline your rights as an individual a little differently, however you are guaranteed some rights through the Ontario Minister's Patient and Family Advisory Council.

#### Accountability

1. Open and seamless communication about your care.
2. Your care team to be accountable and supported to carry out their roles effectively.
3. A health care culture that demonstrates that it values the experiences of patients, families and caregivers.
4. Experience and outcome to drive the accountability of the health care system and those who deliver services, programs and care within it.
5. Health care providers to act with integrity, acknowledging their abilities, biases and limitations.
6. Health care providers to comply with their professional responsibilities and to deliver safe care.

#### Transparency

1. Proactive and meaningful involvement in conversations about care and decisions about our care.
2. Health records will be accurate, complete, available and accessible.
3. Transparent, clear and fair process to express a complaint, concern, or compliment about care that does not impact the quality of the care received.

#### Empathy and Compassion

1. Health care providers to act with empathy, kindness and compassion.
2. Individualized care plans that acknowledge our unique physical, mental, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs.
3. To be treated in a manner free from stigma, assumptions, bias and blame.
4. Providers and leaders to understand that their words, actions and decisions strongly impact the lives of patients, families and caregivers.

#### Equity and Engagement

1. Equal and fair access to the health care system and services for all regardless of ability, race, ethnicity, language, background, place of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, education or location within Ontario.
2. Opportunities for inclusion in health care policy development and program design.
3. Awareness of and efforts to eliminate systemic racism and discrimination, including identification and removal of systemic barriers that contribute to inequitable health care outcomes.

## Respect and Dignity

1. Individual identity, beliefs, history, culture and ability will be respected.
2. Health care providers will introduce themselves and identify their role.
3. To be recognized as part of the care team, to be fully informed about your condition, and have the right to make choices in your care.
4. Patients, families and caregivers to be treated with respect and considered valuable partners on the care team.
5. Personal health information to belong to the individual and remain private, respected and protected.

## Contact Ontario Government for Questions Related to the Patient, Family and Caregiver Declaration of Values for Ontario



<https://www.ontario.ca/feedback/contact-us?id=8794&nid=112364>



8-1-1

## Communicate What Matters to You

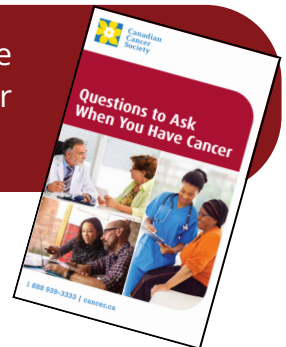
When you share what really matters to you, it helps health care providers gain a deeper understanding of their values. Taking a moment before a appointment to reflect on what matters most to you and sharing it with your health care provider helps ensure you are getting what you need out of your appointments. If you feel your care team is not reviewing or discussing your symptoms and concerns with you, please speak with them directly.

Refer back to the list of questions on page 18 and 19, as well as tips for preparing for appointments on page 8.

Scan for  
information on  
how to tell  
someone about a  
cancer diagnosis



Talking to  
children about a  
cancer diagnosis





## **B** Coping Through Diagnosis and Treatment

### **When Facing a Potential Diagnosis**

Many doctors insist on waiting for full pathology reports before making an official diagnosis. This can result in an anxiety-ridden waiting period. The most difficult aspect of waiting is the open-ended uncertainty of not knowing what is happening inside your body. Conversely, “knowing” can be a relief—even when the news is not good—because you and your doctor then can take action and discuss therapeutic alternatives.

You should also be aware that the time you spend waiting for appointments and for information on your medical status is often determined by circumstances beyond you or your doctor’s control. For example, because of economic pressures, most physicians see more people per hour today than they saw in the past, resulting in shorter office visits. This can make you feel that you have received insufficient consideration of your psychosocial needs. Physicians’ increasingly heavy workloads also lead to longer waiting periods for an appointment, whether for an initial consultation or for subsequent therapy.

Telling someone not to worry would be absurd, however we can employ strategies to manage this anxiety.

### **After Diagnosis**

A diagnosis of cancer undoubtedly comes with a huge feeling of being overwhelmed. Once you absorb the medical details of what your diagnosis means and what kind of treatment you will need, you may be left wondering about the other things – things like:

- How do I tell people about my diagnosis?
- How do I deal with all of the emotions that come with finding out I have cancer?
- Is there any financial assistance that is available to me to help pay for the treatment I need?
- What happens after treatment?
- What happens as cancer advances?

Even now with an official diagnosis, you might find yourself always waiting for something: a secondary diagnosis following surgery; a biopsy, mammogram, or fine needle aspiration; the results of treatment; and when in remission, your next checkup. Anxiety and uncertainty is not contained to before diagnosis, thus we’ve grouped together strategies for managing both before and after diagnosis.



## Practical Tips

Start with one thing from this list, and if it doesn't help, try another. Everyone is unique, but these are things found to be helpful to others.

**1) Review the information you have.** Whether it's the notes you've taken or speaking with the person who came with you to your appointment, clarify and consult with the information you have. People often only hear a fraction of what is said in these anxiety-inducing meetings.

**2) Learn what you can.** However, resist the urge to blindly search the internet for information. Instead, ask your physician or other trusted, reputable sources. You may find if you don't yet have many concrete answers, this may lead to more anxiety, so take in as much information as is helpful for you.

**3) Avoid making quick decisions.** Despite feeling as if a bomb hit you, the situation is not usually emergent (i.e. requiring medical intervention within 24-hours). Now is the time to be proactive rather than reactive' wait to make decisions till after you've had time to process the news.

**4) Begin building your own comprehensive medical record.**

You legally have the right to request access to your health records and must be provided a reason if denied. At the time of tests, request copies of the results and progress notes from staff. Take these records with you to future appointments.

**5) Begin a list of questions** you want to clarify at your next appointment and bring this list with you.

**7) Become familiar with unfamiliar places.** You may spend waiting periods in unfamiliar places like hospitals. Becoming familiar with these new surroundings can help decrease appointment stress and let you and your loved ones get more comfortable while you wait.

**8) Listen to your intuition.** If you sense something is wrong, insist on another test. Trust your instinct. No one knows your body better than you.

**6) Determine the best way to communicate with friends, family, and work about changes in your life.**

You get to decide when and what you share with people in your life. It can become overwhelming communicating with everyone individually. Think about if you want to appointment one point person to share your updates with, or establish a system of sharing information with a larger group, such as a bi-weekly mass email or through a communication app.

Some tips for communicating openly:

- Schedule regular family meetings
- Be transparent about your emotional needs
- Encourage friends and family members to express their feelings or concerns openly
- Use technology to stay connected with distant friends and family
- Consider joining a support group and encourage your friends and family to do the same
- Express gratitude for the support you receive

**9) Focus on what you can control.** Focusing on what you can control is a powerful way to take ownership of your diagnosis. It will allow you to direct your energy and see tangible results. You might feel like you don't have control over very much right now, but try to focus on the following:

- Actively participate in your treatment decisions and plans
- Begin Advanced Care Planning and appoint a Substitute Decision maker who can make decisions for you if you're unable to make them yourself
- Share your wishes with family and friends
- Get therapy if you need guidance
- Find a support network and lean on them

Let's break it down even further:

- Plan your days and do things you have the strength to do
- Eat healthy meals. You may also want to prepare some healthy meals to put in the freezer for when you aren't up to cooking.
- Drink water
- Avoid or try to decrease your usage of alcohol or drugs
- Try to get 30 minutes of movement a day. This can also help keep your strength up
- Delegate to family or friends what you can.
- Rest (start practicing sleep hygiene strategies for better sleep)
- Keep a journal of appointments
- Get a wig if you know you are going to lose your hair during treatment and you want to wear one. It's much easier to match your hair to a wig when you still have your hair.
- See your dentist to make sure your teeth, gums and mouth are healthy. Fix any cavities, broken teeth or swollen gums. This is especially important if you are having radiation therapy to the head or neck or having a type of chemotherapy drug that can cause mouth problems.
- Start practicing mind/body activities: breathing techniques, yoga, meditation, guided imagery, soothing music, or mindfulness

**10) Remind yourself, "I am not alone."** Find good ways to talk about your feelings - anger, guilt, sadness, hurt, denial, fear, or painful thoughts.

Share your thoughts and feelings with trusted individuals, a journal, or even a therapist. Many people find talking with someone else also going through cancer can be very helpful and comforting.

CancerConnection through the Canadian Cancer Society offers an avenue for connecting to others online who are living with cancer, caregivers, or survivors.

Check out what counselling or therapy is available through your local cancer centre.

### CancerConnection

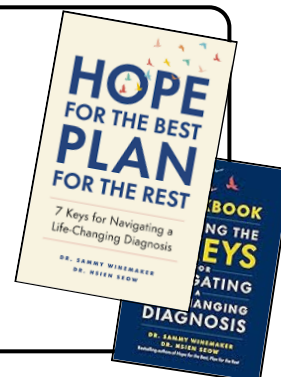


<https://cancerconnection.ca/s/>

Scan for more information on Advanced Care Planning, as well as a fillable workbook



Books like *Hope For The Best, Plan For The Rest* offer more insight into navigating life after a diagnosis



**11) Reach out for support.** Social support can have a huge impact on your mental health when you're facing the stress of a serious medical condition. As well as providing practical assistance, such as driving you to medical appointments or aiding you with household chores, having people to lean on is essential to your emotional well-being. Staying connected to others and continuing to enjoy social activities can make a world of difference in your mood and outlook as you undergo treatment.

**Don't let worries about being a burden keep you from reaching out.** The people who care about you will be flattered by your trust and won't judge you as weak or being a burden. Reaching out to them will only strengthen the bond between you and offer them an opportunity to help.

**Look for support from friends and loved ones who are good listeners.** Someone who'll listen attentively and compassionately without being distracted, judging you, or trying to tell you how you should think or feel. While it's always good to have support from friends and loved ones via phone, text, or social media, it's important to find in-person support as well. Connecting face to face with someone who cares about you can play a huge role in relieving stress and boosting your mood.

**12) Allow yourself to feel what you feel.** It may seem better in the moment to avoid experiencing your emotions, but they exist whether you're paying attention to them or not. Trying to ignore your feelings will only increase stress and maybe even delay recovery.

If you allow yourself to feel what you feel, you'll find that even intense, upsetting feelings will pass, the initial distress you felt at news of your diagnosis will start to ease, and some aspects of life will even return to normal. It's never too late to learn to reconnect with your emotions. You can start by **listening to your body**.

When you experience a strong emotion, you likely also feel it somewhere in your body. Perhaps your stomach tightens up every time you feel anxious or afraid, for example, or your shoulder muscles get tense when you feel a sense of grief. By concentrating on these physical sensations, you can start to explore your emotions rather than trying to ignore or repress them. When your feelings are freed, you'll find different emotions quickly come and go. Even the most painful and difficult feelings will rapidly subside.

**Check out this toolkit on strengthening your emotional intelligence - your ability to identify, understand, and use your own emotions - for tips on connecting with your emotions**



## Relaxation and Grounding Tools

Check out the links and videos below for some examples of mind/body activities you can practice to aid in coping. While not every strategy here will be helpful for everyone, some take practice before being fully effective or immersive.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation teaches you how to relax your muscles, lowering your overall tension and stress levels, and helping you relax. Thus, this can also help reduce physical problems such as stomachaches or headaches, as well as improve sleep.



### Breathing Techniques

There are a wide variety of breathing techniques that can help manage stress and be used in distressing situations to help in the immediate by calming the nervous system and increasing oxygen in the body.

### Mindfulness & Meditation

Sometimes, coupled together with breathing, mindfulness can look like a variety of different things, from a body scan to engaging the senses; mindfulness can reduce stress and anxiety, improve focus and attention, improve emotional regulation, and enhance relationships. Mindfulness can also be incorporated into your everyday routines in some of the following ways:

- Love your favourite things: *Eat your favourite food. Turn off the TV, place the food in front of you, look at it, taste it, and smell it. Enjoy it!*
- Take a walk outside: *Walk slowly and really focus on being there. Notice what you see, hear, and smell.*
- Practice self reflection: *Ask yourself, what's really going on here? Remind yourself that your thoughts are "just thoughts." Thoughts come and go.*



### 5 Senses

The 5 senses activity (also called 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique) is a mindful way of grounding yourself back in the present moment and decreasing distress.

### Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a relaxation technique where you use your imagination to create a peaceful and calming mental state, often used to manage stress, pain, and other negative feelings. Guided imagery is a powerful technique as we can invoke our bodies and minds to respond as if we were seeing the imagery in front of us in real life.



### Yoga

Yoga can reduce stress by promoting relaxation, improving mental clarity, and enhancing physical well-being through techniques like controlled breathing, mindfulness, and physical postures. There are a wide range of yoga practices that vary in difficulty and physical ability.

## Journaling

Journaling offers numerous benefits, including enhanced self-awareness, better memory, and stress reduction, all while promoting emotional processing and personal growth. Journaling can be used in periods of high stress, or as a daily practice. Here are a few potential prompts to get you thinking:

- *"Write a letter to your body. What would you say to it as it experiences fear, uncertainty, and anxiety?"*
- *"How have anxiety and fear changed your relationship with your illness?"*
- *"In which ways do your mental health and your physical health connect? Do you notice changes in your pain or fatigue when you are stressed out?"*
- *"Picture yourself surrounded by joy. What is joy? What is its shape, color, sound, or texture? Picture yourself being encompassed by it and held up in its arms. How do you feel? How does this help to provide support for your body and mind?"*

## Practicing Gratitude

No one "feels" grateful that they have something horrible happen to them, But it is vital to make a distinction between *feeling* grateful and *being* grateful. We don't have total control over our emotions. We cannot easily will ourselves to feel grateful. Feelings follow from the way we look at the world. Actively practicing gratitude can improved mood, sleep, and relationships, and reduce stress and anxiety. Ways to practice gratitude include:

- Keeping a gratitude journal
- Making a habit of reflecting on daily blessings
- Openly expressing thankfulness toward loved ones and caregivers
- Consciously finding silver linings, even in difficult situations and days
- Focusing on the lessons you can learn from the hard days
- Using mindfulness practices that focus on awareness and appreciation



## Laughter

Humour is a very effective coping mechanism and doesn't mean you aren't taking cancer seriously. It's OK to laugh. When a person laughs, their brain releases chemicals that relax muscles and make them feel good. So don't hesitate to watch your favourite funny movie or read your favourite funny book again. Or call a friend to tell them about the silly thing your pet did. You just might feel better afterwards.

## Hobbies, Interests, and Creative Outlets

Do something enjoyable and purposeful each day, something physically challenging that you enjoy, or something relaxing and peaceful. This can help balance out the stresses of daily life or pass the time. Photography, drawing or painting, and music are also great ways to express your emotions. Spending time with pets or animals, cooking, gardening, volunteering, woodworking, or any other activity that brings you a sense of joy can be a great outlet.

## Have more questions? Connect

This booklet is just one tool that you can use. Reach out to organizations in your community and your local hospital for more resources local to you and information specific to your circumstances.

You're also welcome to always reach out to Gilda's Club to participate in some of our support groups or social opportunities to help build your community of support.

Reach us at Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka at [program@gildasclubsm.org](mailto:program@gildasclubsm.org) or (705) 726-5199.