

# “Healing and Recovery” After Cancer Treatment



## A Time for Healing



It is helpful to view the first year after active cancer treatment has finished as, "Healing and Recovery". Mind, body, and spirit all take time to recover and heal. There have been many changes that have taken place in your life and body.

If you are discharged into surveillance for a cancer that is not curable, this may be the most challenging time of the process since diagnosis. If you have been told by your doctors that your cancer is gone, you may find that you are still not emotionally healed.

It is important to give yourself permission to take time to heal emotionally, spiritually and physically from the impact of your diagnosis and treatment. For many people, this can take at least one year.

## You Finished Treatment, What is Next?

Instead of feeling relieved and happy after treatment, you may find that you feel a range of emotions such as sad, irritable, depressed, weepy, lonely, or scared. These are very normal feelings. Individuals may think ; "I do not know what is wrong with me. I should be feeling happy because I am supposed to be able to get back to my life now, but I do not. I am scared."

Often family and friends are ready to move on and are celebrating the end of your treatment process. You may find yourself not ready to celebrate and feel that the cancer treatment is not over.

## Beyond Survival Mode

Much has changed since the cancer diagnosis. Your whole life, body and self may feel broken and forever changed by your experience. The changes to your body and your identity can create a painful grief process. You may find yourself grieving that your body is no longer what it was and having to find the energy to live with the daily symptoms and impact of this. These changes may be straining your relationships and your sense of strength for living.

Work with your doctors for managing the symptoms of the body changes you have experienced. It takes time to reconcile with these changes. Give yourself permission to feel whatever it is you feel and do not try to put a brave face on when it is not true. Grief

is normal, real and takes time and support to heal your heart. Healing can and will happen over time. Be gentle to yourself in this process. Stay close with people who understand and who 'get you' without having to put a "I'm okay face on", if you are not feeling okay that day.

During treatment you can be in survival mode. Your life is filled with appointments, support and contact with many people from your health care team and your friends and family. When treatment is done, there is a lot of time to think and process. This is often when some people find themselves overwhelmed. After treatment, having less contact with the health care team can feel like a loss, even though it is a relief not to be in active treatment.

Sometimes the support that gathers around you in your community during diagnosis and treatment slows down once it is over, even though you feel you need more support now than ever.

## **Healing and Recovering**

Your mind, body and spirit need time to recover. Healing is different from surviving. Surviving is putting one foot in front of the other, and this has allowed you to get through treatment. Healing is feeling like you are getting your life back and have gained new insight. As your body slowly recovers from the side effects of treatments, you may change direction in your life and have a new meaning and purpose.

Examples of questions that have brought people to counselling after active cancer treatment are:

- How do I want to live my life now? I do not want to waste a second more of my precious time.
- What is truly important to me in life?
- I am no longer who I was. What do I want to focus on in my life?
- I do not know what I believe anymore.
- How do I live with the fear of recurrence?



Counselling and spiritual care sessions offer you support and guidance with your questions. They also help you find your own unique new way of living your life with meaning, purpose and renewed trust and hope. You can learn to put fear second and put living first, one day at a time.

## Self Care Strategies

- Giving yourself a lot of time can be the best healer.
- Laughter- Watch shows and movies that make you laugh and feel good.
- Cope with fear. Keep out media that fills the mind with fear. Challenge fear thoughts with a different, true, and hopeful story.
- Human connection - Make time for friends to enjoy company.
- Explain to your family what you are feeling and that this is normal.
- Take gentle walks.
- Talk through your fears with a wise listener who does not try to fix them.
- Try something new- Try a new creative activity or do something familiar that you enjoy.
- Meditation-it is easier to do in a group. Wellspring, Hospice, and yoga centres all run groups that may help.
- Express your feelings- Rather than bottling them up and moving on, find a way to express your feelings (i.e. create art work or write poetry).
- Seek help if you are struggling.

## Counselling

The LRCP Supportive Care program offers short term counselling for patients in this recovery stage. It helps with:



- Transitioning individuals back to a new normal life
- Determining how and when to return to work
- Experiencing other new roles and responsibilities
- Finding ways to cope with life between surveillance appointments
- Debriefing difficult medical information/experiences and post treatment symptoms

Some patients need to share their story and experience of the medical system. Counselling can offer an opportunity to find new ways to move on with living, and managing your fears and anxieties.

Patients may transition to the care of their primary family doctor at this time. This may feel distressing for some individuals. You may need to process this transition through the use

of counselling at the Cancer Centre. You may also wish to seek counselling outside of the Cancer Centre as a way of distancing yourself from this medical setting. Individuals can find this very helpful at times.

## Community Resources

### Canadian Cancer Society

[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

1-888-939-3333

Offers peer support, resources, and support groups.

### Daya Counselling Centre

[www.dayacounselling.on.ca](http://www.dayacounselling.on.ca)

519-433-0077

A variety of counsellors and subsidized counselling (usually have wait list for subsidy).

### Family Service Thames Valley, London

<https://www.familyserVICETHAMESVALLEY.COM/counselling-services>

519-433-0183

A variety of counsellors and subsidized counselling (usually have wait list for subsidy).

### Health Services for Southwest

[www.southwesthealthline.ca](http://www.southwesthealthline.ca)

### Wellspring London & Region

[www.wellspringlondon.ca](http://www.wellspringlondon.ca)

519-438-7379

### Counselling at LRCP

For **Social Work Counselling**,

contact Supportive Care at

519-685-8622

and ask to speak with the Social Worker for your oncology team.

If you are following up with an Oncologist, please discuss these experiences with them, and they will refer you to counselling services.

If your follow up is with your family doctor you can request to be connected to community counselling services. You can check your Employee Assistance Program through your workplace.

