

# After Diagnosis: A Guide for People With Cancer and Their Loved Ones



Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. This booklet aims to provide guidance, reassurance, and practical steps to help you feel more in control. You are not alone—support and resources are available at every step of the way.

The content is designed from the perspective of the person with cancer. Nonetheless, caregivers, family members and other loved ones are also likely to find this information helpful.



# General Steps to Navigate a Cancer Diagnosis

## 1. Take Time to Process Your Diagnosis

Learning that you have cancer is overwhelming. It's normal to feel shocked, disbelief, fear, sadness, or anger. Allow yourself more time to process these emotions and caring for yourself.

## 2. Understand Your Diagnosis

Understanding your specific diagnosis can help you regain some sense of control. Ask your doctor to explain your type of cancer, its stage, and how it may progress. Write down your questions and take notes during appointments to ensure you fully understand the information provided.

### Some helpful questions to ask your doctor may include:

- What type of cancer do I have?
- What stage is it in?
- What are my treatment options?
- What are the potential side effects of treatment?

Having cancer is different for each person. Your experience may be affected by the type of cancer you have, whether the cancer has stayed where it started or spread to other parts of your body and whether you have other medical problems.



### 3. Making Treatment Decisions

Making decisions for the treatment may impact the outcomes of your future, hence making an informed decision is very important to ensure the best treatment outcomes.

Your doctor should explain your options and answer your questions before you decide which treatment choice is best for you. Be sure you understand what you can expect with each treatment before choosing one.

### 4. What are the treatment options?



#### Surgery

Surgery can be used for treatment if the cancer seems to be contained in one area (localized). Surgery may be used to remove some or all the cancer along with any nearby tissue that might have cancer cells.

#### Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy uses strong beams of energy to destroy or damage cancer cells so they can't grow. Radiation therapy can be given in different ways:

##### External radiation:

A machine directs high-energy rays from outside your body into the tumor.

##### Internal radiation:

A radioactive source is put inside your body, usually into or near the tumor.

##### Systemic radiation:

Radioactive medicines are given by mouth or put into a vein. These medicines then travel through your body to target and kill certain types of cancer cells.





## Chemotherapy (Chemo)

Chemotherapy is a treatment with medicines that can kill cancer cells. Chemo is used to treat many types of cancer, but not everyone who has cancer will get chemo. The goal of treatment with chemo can be different, depending on the type of cancer and its stage.

Chemo can be used to:

- Cure the cancer (this means that the cancer goes away and does not come back).
- Shrink tumours and/or stop the cancer from growing and spreading.
- Relieve symptoms caused by cancer.
- Shrink a tumour before surgery to make it easier to remove.
- Lower the risk of cancer coming back after surgery or radiation.

## Targeted Medicine Therapy

Targeted medicines find and attack only specific parts of cancer cells and would not attack or damage normal and healthy cells.



## Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy uses your immune system to help treat cancer. Some immunotherapy drugs help the immune system work harder so it can find cancer cells and stop them from growing and spreading. Other types can change how the immune system works so it is able to attack the cancer cells better.



## Hormone therapy

Some cancers depend on hormones to grow. Treatments that block the effect of hormones might help or stop the growth of these cancers. These are used most often to treat breast and prostate cancer.

## Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are research studies that test new treatments in people. Many cancer clinical trials test a new treatment and compare it to a standard treatment. Standard treatments are those typically used to treat a type of cancer.



## Palliative care

Palliative care focuses on improving your quality of life. It helps you to cope with the physical, emotional, spiritual and social impact cancer has on your life. It's not about giving up on treatment but rather about providing comfort and support at any stage of the cancer journey.

## 5. Anticipate possible side effects

The best time to plan for changes to your body is right after your cancer diagnosis and before you begin treatment. Prepare yourself now so that you'll be able to deal with everything later.

Some common side effects of treatment may include hair loss, fatigue, changes in appetite, and skin changes. Though there will be side effects, it is manageable with proper care and preparation. You may get some advice from doctors about lifestyle adjustments, clothing, makeup, and wigs that may help you feel more comfortable.

Also think about how treatment will affect your daily life. You may need to spend more time in the hospital or have many medical appointments. If your treatment makes it hard to perform your daily duties, you may make arrangements for this.

## 6. Common Reactions to Diagnosis

It is normal to feel various feelings which include shock, denial, anger, sadness, fear with regards to the uncertainty about the cancer treatment.

### What can you do when you feel all of these overwhelming emotions?

- Seeking support by joining local support groups.
- Obtain support from religious or spiritual communities.
- Let friends and family members help you, such as running errands, taking you to appointments, preparing meals and helping you with household chores. This also can give those who care about you a way to help during a difficult time.
- Review your priorities and find out what is important in your life. Find time for the activities that are most important to you and give you the most meaning. Check your calendar and cancel activities that don't meet your goals.
- Engage in self-care activities such as singing, drawing, listening to music, writing a diary and reflections, taking a break, and providing yourself with what is needed. This may help to reduce the tension emotionally due to the stressful events that happened.
- If your current coping strategies are not helpful in managing your emotions, it is recommended to seek professional mental health support from a **psychiatrist** and a **clinical psychologist** at **Sunway Medical Centre Penang**.
- Kindly **contact 04-373 9191** for booking a **mental health check** and **therapy session** with our **psychiatrist** and **clinical psychologist** today.



## 7. Nutrition and Lifestyle

Eating well can help you stay strong, manage side effects, and recover better. The goal is to keep your weight steady and maintain your energy throughout treatment.

### What to Eat

- Choose high-protein and high-calorie foods to help your body heal and stay strong.
- Eat when you feel your best. Have your biggest meal when your appetite is stronger, even if it's not at regular mealtimes.
- It's okay to eat the same food often. If only certain foods appeal to you, stick with them until your appetite improves.
- Drink protein shakes or meal replacements if solid food is hard to take.

### If You Can't Eat Much

- Don't worry if your appetite is low for a day.
- Focus on staying hydrated—sip fluids throughout the day.
- If you cannot eat for more than 2 days, let your doctor or dietitian know.

### Stay Hydrated

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially on days you don't feel like eating.
- Water, soups, and nourishing drinks all count.

## Prevent Foodborne Illness

Some cancer treatments lower your immunity. To stay safe:

- Avoid raw or undercooked food (like sushi, half-boiled eggs, or rare meat).
- Avoid raw salads and berries that are hard to clean.
- Do not eat food left out overnight.
- Wash fruits well or peel them before eating.

## Don't Believe Nutrition Myths

- There's no strong proof that one food "feeds cancer."
- Don't cut out foods unnecessarily—your body needs nutrition now more than ever.
- Always talk to your healthcare team before making big changes to your diet.



## Stay Active, Rest Well

- Keep moving as much as you comfortably can. Light activity like walking helps with energy, mood, and digestion.
- Research shows regular physical activity may reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and even lower the risk of death.
- Rest is just as important—listen to your body and take breaks when needed.



Professional support from **dietitians** at **Sunway Medical Centre Penang** is always available, kindly contact **04-373 9191** to get your appointment for dietetic consultation today.

This journey may feel difficult, but you are never alone. Many of us from all walks of life have walked this path with courage, and you can too. Reach out, ask questions, and take each step with hope and strength.



## Sunway Medical Centre Penang Cancer Services

If you have any inquiries regarding your treatment and hope to clarify, we are here to help. Contact us at **04-373 9191** and drop us your questions and concerns.

### Cancer Support Group Resources

#### 1. Sunway Medical Centre Penang Cancer Support Group



019-217 0281



[smcp\\_cancersupport@sunway.com.my](mailto:smcp_cancersupport@sunway.com.my)

#### 2. National Cancer Society of Malaysia, Penang Branch



04-228 4140



[ncsmpenang@gmail.com](mailto:ncsmpenang@gmail.com)

#### 3. Penang BreastCare Hub



+6012 983 1429 (WhatsApp only)



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