What to Expect video series companion guide

The "What to Expect" video series includes four videos and this companion guide to support patients and families as they navigate their BC Cancer experience.

Visit www.bccancer.bc.ca/whattoexpect to view all videos and guides.

This video series was co-designed by six patient and family storytellers, BC Cancer staff and the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

CO-CREATED WITH PATIENTS & FAMILIES

October 2026

Video 1 Navigating resources and services

The cancer care system is complex and can be overwhelming. Learning more about your diagnosis can help you feel more informed and prepared to ask questions.

This companion guide highlights trusted information and services to help you navigate your care with confidence.

Key takeaways

- You do not have to remember everything today
- Learn one step at a time
- Being informed can help you feel more prepared
- Write down your questions as they come up
- Reach out early if you need help or support
- Bring someone with you to appointments if you can

Your cancer care journey

Everyone's journey is different, but many people go through similar early steps.

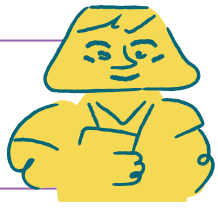
1 Diagnosis

You receive your diagnosis and basic information about your cancer.



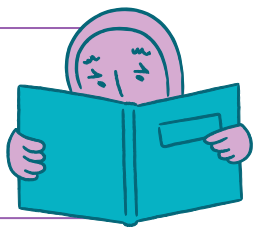
2 First appointment

You meet with your cancer care team and talk about your health and next steps.



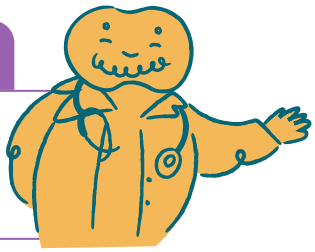
3 Treatment options

You learn about the treatment options available to you and work with your team to create a care plan.



4 Beginning treatment

You begin your treatment with support from you care team.



5 Follow-up care and support

You continue with follow-up care, monitoring and support to help you stay as well as possible.



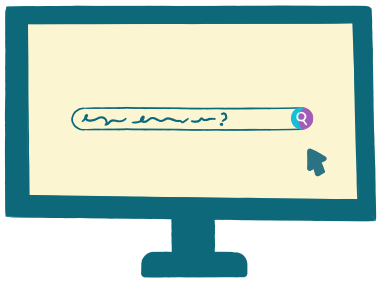
Your care plan will be personalized to your individual needs.

Your care team is here to support you every step of the way.

Helpful links to get you started

BC Cancer

Find information about regional centres, services, treatments, care teams, supports, types of cancer, prevention, screening, clinical trials, research and more.



BC Cancer library

The BC Cancer library provides trusted information to support you through your journey.

Books, videos, e-books, audio materials and cancer pathfinders are available. Each cancer centre has librarians that can help you find information and navigate library resources.

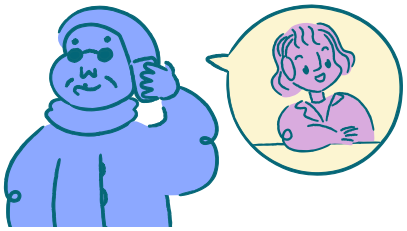
Canadian Cancer Society

Canadian Cancer Society shares resources, supports and information to Canadians who are affected by cancer.

This includes information about different types of cancer, a Community Services Locator, a Cancer Information Helpline, a Live Chat and Transportation and Travel Supports.

Person-centred supports

Person-centred supports such as interpreters, spiritual care and Indigenous patient navigators are also available to support individual needs and preferences.



Indigenous patient navigators (IPNs)

IPNs work with cancer teams to deliver supportive, trauma-informed and culturally safe care to Indigenous patients and their families.

Members of the care team can refer their patients and patients can also request to be connected to IPNs at each of BC Cancer's regional centres.

Spiritual health

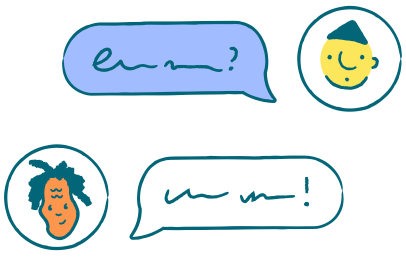
Spiritual health practitioners support patients and families to explore their spirituality in the context of cancer. Individual and group sessions are available.

You can make an appointment and learn more by e-mailing spiritualcare1@bccancer.bc.ca or calling 604-877-6000 ext. 672115

Virtual interpreters

Virtual interpreters are available in over 200 languages (including American Sign Language) for your appointments.

You can request an interpreter when you are contacted to set up your first appointment.



Support groups

Connecting with others who have been through a similar experience can be a valuable source of support.



BC Cancer support groups

BC Cancer Patient & Family Counselling runs several online and in-person support groups for our patients and their families/ caregivers.

Learn more about the different support groups and view the calendar.

BC Cancer Supportive Care e-bulletin

Sign up to receive regular news and updates about BC Cancer and community supports.

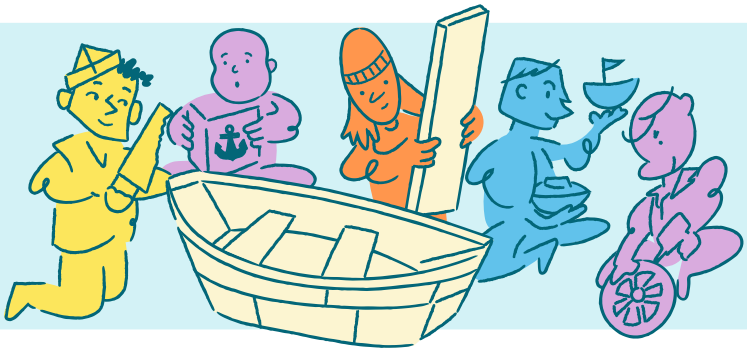
You can sign up here.

Community support groups

There are many support groups in the community based on types of cancer, demographics, culture and language, location and more.

Consult Patient & Family Counselling, visit Canadian Cancer Society Community Services Locator or conduct an internet and social media search for cancer support groups.

"Support groups I found very helpful. Luckily for me, there was a group that met every other week for people the same age as me... being able to speak to people about my treatment who understood the impacts of that treatment made a big difference."



Your health information

Access your health records

Health Gateway is a centralized provincial online platform for B.C. residents 12 and older. You can quickly view your lab results, imaging reports and medication histories using your mobile BC Services Card.

Request your health records from BC Cancer

You can request your health records including appointment notes, lab results, test results, medication history, screening letters and more.

There may be other digital ways of seeing your health information, doctor's notes, seeing future appointments and getting appointment reminders. Check with your care team about the digital tools available to you.



When to reach out

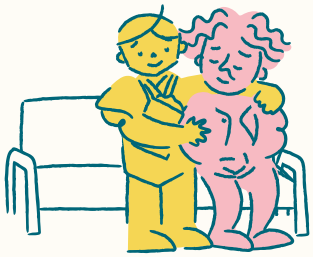
Contact your care team if you experience new or worsening symptoms, treatment side effects, or have questions about your care.

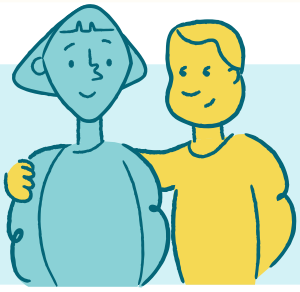


Need immediate medical attention? Call 911 or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

Remember

You do not have to navigate cancer alone. There are people, services and resources available to support you throughout your cancer journey. Every question is important, and your care team is here to help.





"You are not alone, it's terrifying to get that diagnosis, but many people have been there before you and are with you. There are resources and supports out there to help you navigate that path."

Video 2 The treatment experience

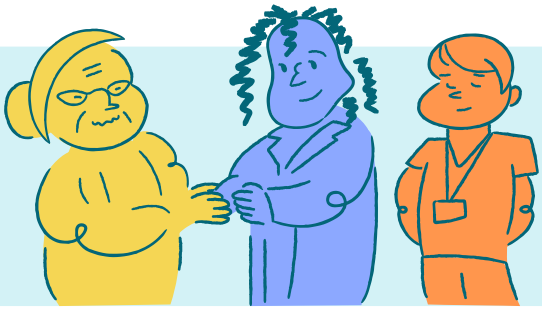
Every cancer journey is different. Cancer care can vary depending on your type and stage of cancer, treatment plan, where you live and other circumstances.

It's normal to feel anxious, uncertain, or overwhelmed at the start. Support is important and available.

Key takeaways

- Support is available for your physical, emotional, spiritual and practical needs
- Write down your questions to bring to appointments
- Your care team will explain your treatment plan and answer your questions
- Side effects vary from person to person
- Tell your care team about new or worsening symptoms

"Don't hesitate to ask questions from your team. The team wants your input. They want you to be a partner in your care, so generate a list of questions before every appointment. "



Understanding your treatment

You will meet with your care team to talk about treatment options and supports. Your care team will work with you to choose a treatment plan that's right for you.

Main types of cancer treatments:

Systemic therapy

Systemic therapy includes drug treatments that travel through the body to treat cancer cells.

There are different types of systemic therapy such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy and other drug treatments.



Surgery

Procedures to remove tumours or cancerous tissue from a specific place in the body. Normally performed at hospitals near cancer centres.

Surgery is often the first step in cancer treatment because it can be used to both diagnose and treat cancer.

Radiation therapy

A high energy x-ray is used to target specific areas and destroy cancer cells. Most radiation therapy is delivered by a machine from outside of the body (external radiation therapy).

Radiation therapy can also be delivered from inside the body, called internal radiation therapy or brachytherapy.



What treatment may be like

- Regular bloodwork and appointments with your oncologist
- Monitoring for side effects
- Changes to your schedule and/or medications
- Ongoing conversations with your care team
- Periods where you feel well and periods when you need more rest

Learn more about different treatment options

Prepare for your first visit

- Bring a list of your questions
- Wear comfortable clothing
- Bring water (refillable water bottle) and snacks (if appropriate)
- Bring any medications you may need, as well as a list of all medications you are currently taking
- Tell your team about any new symptoms or concerns
- Bring a support person if possible (you may need someone to drive you or be a contact during your appointment)
- Consider recording your appointments (consent must be provided from those being recorded)

Learn more about preparing for your first visit

Managing side effects

Side effects are different for everyone. Many can be managed or lessened when addressed early. Contact your care team if symptoms are new, worsening or difficult to manage. Follow the symptom management instructions provided by your oncology team.

Support beyond treatment

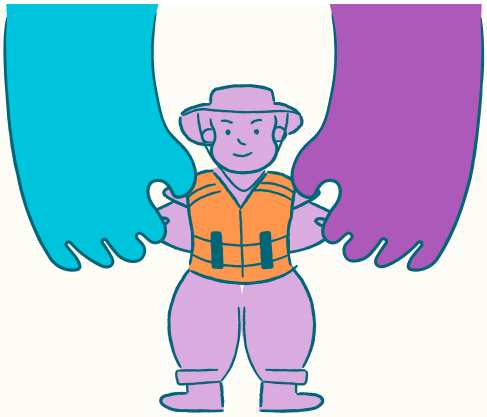
Cancer care is not just about treatment. Emotional, mental and practical supports are essential. BC Cancer offers counselling support to help you, your family and caregivers.

Related sources

- Patient & family counselling
- Coping with cancer
- Life after treatment

Remember

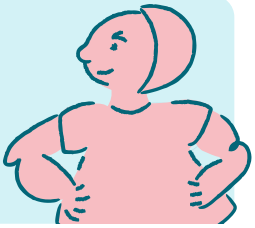
BC Cancer is here to support you. In the early days, your referring provider will be your main point of contact. During your treatment phase, you can connect with your oncologist or nurse with any questions. Even once your treatment is complete, there are BC Cancer and community supports available to you.



Video 3 Your care team

Cancer care is a team effort. While your oncologist and nurses may be the people you see most often, many professionals work together to support your physical, emotional and practical needs throughout your cancer journey.

"The most important person on your care team is you. Your questions, goals and preferences matter."



Key takeaways

- You are an important partner in your care
- Everyone's care team looks different and will be based on your individual needs
- Ask questions whenever something is unclear
- Your care team can connect you with additional supports



Who you may meet

You will often work closely with your oncologist, general practitioner in oncology (GPO) or nurse practitioner who develops your treatment plan, and your nurses, who support you with information, education and your care. Learn more about roles that may be a part of your care team.

If needed, your care team may connect you with other care providers at BC Cancer, such as counsellors, dietitians, pain and symptom management, speech-language pathology or an Indigenous patient navigator.

Oncologists

Oncologists are doctors that specialize in diagnosing & treating cancer. They will often lead your care planning and support.

Main types of oncologists:

- **Medical oncologists** – specialize in treating cancer using systemic therapy (treatments that travel through the bloodstream to reach cancer cells)
- **Radiation oncologists** – specialize in using radiation therapy, which uses high energy beams to destroy cancer cells. They work with Radiation Therapists to plan and deliver radiation treatments
- **Surgical oncologists** – specialize in treating cancer through surgical procedures (removing tumors and tissue, performing biopsies, etc.)

General practitioner in oncology (GPO)

A family doctor with specialized training to provide cancer care, manage systemic therapies and support survivorship.

Nurse practitioner (NP) oncologist

Advanced practice nurses who specialize in caring for people diagnosed with cancer. They prescribe treatments and see patients before, during and after treatment.

Nurses

Nurses are a core part of your care team. They often have the most contact with you and will complete intake, answer questions, support you through phone lines, support you through treatment and more.

Pharmacists

Pharmacists prepare cancer drugs and other medications and explain how they work. Every BC Cancer centre has a pharmacy where you can receive your medications and ask questions.

Health supports while you are receiving care

Indigenous patient navigators

An Indigenous patient navigator (IPN) works with the cancer team to deliver supportive, trauma-informed and culturally safe care to Indigenous patients and their families.

Patients who identify as Indigenous, First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Status and Non-Status can be referred or self-refer for IPN support.

BC Cancer nursing phone lines

During your treatment, if you need help to manage your symptoms your care team will provide you with a phone line to speak to an oncology nurse.



Pain & Symptom Management/ Palliative Care

This team offers pain and symptom management clinics at each of BC Cancer's regional centres.

Patients can access support through a referral or by contacting the team directly at their cancer centre.

Nutrition Services

Registered dietitians help to improve and maintain nutritional status before and during your cancer treatment and also help to address any eating challenges you are experiencing.

A referral is required to access one on one dietitian support. Group nutrition classes are available. Learn more here.

Patients & Families can also call 8-1-1 to talk to a dietitian with knowledge in oncology nutrition.



Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy can help with movement, pain management, fatigue, balance, lymphedema and more.

A referral is required.

Patient & Family Counselling

Counsellors and social workers can support your mental health and social support needs.

Patients and families can access support from time of diagnosis until 18 months after active treatment. Contact Patient & Family Counselling at your regional centre.

Psychiatry

BC Cancer psychiatrists help patients with depression and anxiety, problems with sleep, changes in personality, fear of treatment or illness, changes in thoughts and perception and optimizing psychiatric medications through cancer treatments.

A referral is required.

Speech Language Pathology

Speech Language Pathology assists patients under the care of BC Cancer to maximize their communication and swallowing abilities.

A referral is required.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Cancer and its treatments can affect your work or education plans. You may need some support and information. A vocational rehabilitation counsellor can help.

Accessible through Patient & Family Counselling at each regional centre.



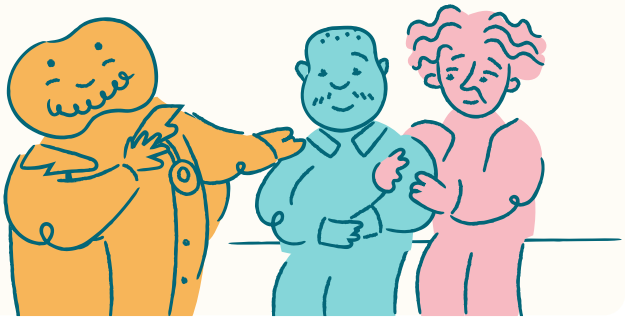
Learn more about supportive care services

Available supports may vary depending on your location, diagnosis and treatment plan – your care team can help connect you to what's available.

Remember

Care is more than treatment – it's connection, support and people who are here for you.

You are not alone. Your care team is here to support you every step of the way.



Video 4 Your role

You and your family are essential partners in your cancer care, and being involved can help you feel more confident and less stressed.

We encourage you to ask questions, express and share what matters most to you, so your care reflects your needs and values.

Key takeaways

- You are the expert on your own life and what matters most to you
- Ask questions whenever something is unclear
- Share your concerns, priorities and goals with your care team
- Accept help from others when you need it
- Support is available for both you and your family

Ways you can participate in your care

What matters most to you is an important part of your care. The following resource from Health Quality BC can help you think about and share your needs, preferences, goals and concerns with your care team, so you can work together to make decisions that reflect what matters to you. Learn more about "What matters to you?" conversations.

Learn more about questions you can ask your doctor or care team.

"I think that people shouldn't underestimate the amount of agency that they have. And truly, BC Cancer wants patients to be partners in shared decision making."



Your team values your input and you can decide how involved you want to be and what supports feel right for you.



"This is a marathon, not a sprint. So you really need to accept help and take as much off your shoulders as you can."

Building a support system can make a big difference. This can include your care team, family, friends, peers and community.

Family & caregiver supports

Family support

Information, handouts, workbooks and web links for supporting children, teens and caregivers when cancer comes to the family.

Caregivers

Learn more about emotional supports and resources, including helpful handouts, videos and links to support caregivers.

Emotional support

Learn more about emotional supports and resources, including helpful handouts and videos to support you.

BC Cancer library cancer pathfinders

Pathfinders include books and websites on different types of cancers and supports.

Virtual support groups

Learn more about support programs and groups available in the community.





"One thing I had done was just keep a positive outlook. Whatever it's going to be, just making sure that everyone's ready to go and that we're going to fight this thing together and we're going to get through it."

Remember

Every cancer journey is different. There is no expectation that you have to do everything on your own. Your care team is here to answer your questions, support your decisions and help you navigate your care. Every experience with cancer is unique, but support is always available.



This information is intended to support, not replace, advice from your healthcare team. If you have questions about your health, symptoms, or treatment options, please contact your care team. For medical emergencies, call 911 immediately.

BC Cancer respectfully acknowledges that we provide care on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Indigenous Peoples and Nations across British Columbia.

BC CANCER Provincial Health Services Authority

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