



FOLLOW-UP AFTER CERVICAL CANCER TREATMENT

Why follow-up?

Follow-up care aims to help you to stay in good health after your treatment for cervical cancer.

You may be having side effects, such as fatigue or mood swings. The treatment may also have impacted on your relationships or your sexuality or you may need support with diet, exercise and activity. Follow-up care aims to support you and to work with you to find the best ways of working through these issues.

How much is enough?

This information is based on guidelines that have been recommended by your doctor and oncology nurses.

Keep in mind though that every person treated for cancer is different. These are only recommendations and are not meant to replace your judgement or your specialist's judgement. The final decision you and your doctors make

will be based on your individual circumstances. For instance, if you are participating in a clinical trial your follow up program may be different to what is described in this leaflet.

Note that 'year one' begins when all of your treatment has been completed.

The following table outlines the recommendations.

Year	Frequency	Appointment with
1-4	Every 3-4 months	Specialist
5-6	Every 6 months	Specialist
7-10	Annually	Specialist
After year 10	Annually	You are discharged to your GP

What happens at the appointment?

You and the hospital will arrange your follow-up according to the above schedule.

Appointments may alternate between your various specialists (oncologists, treating or referring surgeon and radiation oncologist, if you had radiotherapy).

At your appointment we will discuss a range of issues including; side effects of treatment, treatment related fatigue, impacts of treatment on your relationships and/or sexuality, changes in mood, exercise, activity and diet and any other issues that you would like to raise.

Before your appointment it might be helpful to write down the things you would like to talk about or questions that you would like to ask.

You will be offered an examination which will include a pelvic examination.

Tests

Generally, we recommend vaginal cytology (taking a sample of the cells at the top of the vagina) test as part of your routine follow-up, even if you have had your cervix removed.

We don't recommend this test if you have had radiotherapy. This is because radiotherapy can cause 'false positive' results; meaning that your test may show cancer when you don't actually have it. A vaginal cytology test should only be performed by (or on the advice of) your specialist.

Other tests may be recommended if you have new symptoms.

What to look out for

Even if you have had a follow-up appointment, if you have any of the following symptoms it is important that you seek medical advice.

- Bleeding not related to periods
- Pain that worsens over time, especially back pain, pelvic pain and pain that radiates down one or both legs

- Leg swelling (particularly one sided)
- Change of bladder or bowel habits (not related to your treatment)
- Lump in the abdomen, neck, navel, groin or vulva.

Staying well

Smoking

If you smoke, it is important to quit. Quitting helps improve appetite and overall health. It can also reduce the chance of developing a new cancer. If you want to quit smoking and need help call the Quit Line 13 78 42 or speak to your nurse, specialist or local doctor (GP).

Exercise

Regular physical activity is important for good health. Regardless of your age, sex or physical ability, engaging in physical activity can provide health benefits for cancer survivors.

Diet

It is important to eat a well-balanced diet.

Vaginal cylinders

If you had radiotherapy as part of your treatment your specialist may suggest you use a vaginal cylinder. Information will be provided by your treating team if this is appropriate for you.

Life after cancer treatment

To learn more about follow-up care for cervical cancer, consider asking your doctor or oncology nurse (if you have one) the following questions:

- What follow-up care plan would you recommend for me?
- What is the risk the cancer will recur?
- Is menopause going to be an issue for me? And do I require a referral for this?
- Do I need hormone replacement therapy? Am I allowed to have hormone replacement therapy?
- What about sexual relationships?

Feelings after finishing treatment

After treatment you might experience a mixture of feelings which may include:

- Relief
- Happiness
- Fear
- Loss

Immediately after your treatment, you may have concerns about your future and how you will cope. You may wish to read the Cancer Council's publication titled Living Well After Cancer, which provides strategies for coping with specific feelings and concerns.

Call the Cancer Council for details of counsellors and internet/telephone/general support groups.

For more information or support

If you have any concerns or questions ask your oncology nurse or specialist for advice.

Gynaecological Oncology Unit

Royal Women's Hospital
T: (03) 8345 3566

Women's Welcome Centre

Royal Women's Hospital
T: (03) 8345 3037 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)
E: wwcadmin@thewomens.org.au

The centre can assist you in finding a range of women's health information to meet your individual needs.

Cancer Council Helpline

T: 13 11 20
W: www.cancervic.org.au

Counterpart

T: 1300 781 500
W: www.counterpart.org.au

Cancer Australia

W: canceraustralia.gov.au

This leaflet has been adapted from ASCO Patient Guide Clinical Practice Guidelines, Follow-Up Care for Breast Cancer October 2006 www.cancer.net