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After Nasopharyngeal Cancer Treatment

Get information about life as a survivor, follow-up tests, and staying healthy after nasopharyngeal cancer treatment.

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor or the chances of the cancer coming back.

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Living as a Nasopharyngeal Cancer Survivor

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For some people with nasopharyngeal cancer (NPC), the end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back (recurring). This is very common if you've had cancer.

For others, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatments to try and help control the cancer for as long as possible. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)¹ for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up [exams and tests](#)²
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as [early detection \(screening\) tests](#)³ for other types of cancer, or tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what to watch for and when and how you should contact your doctor
- Recommendations for things you could do to improve your health and even possibly lower the chance of your cancer coming back, such as diet and physical activity suggestions
- Reminders about your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Follow-up care after nasopharyngeal cancer

People with cancer of the nasopharynx are at risk for the cancer coming back ([a recurrence](#)⁴) and developing new cancers in other parts of the body, so they must be watched closely after treatment. Your cancer care team will discuss which tests should be done and how often based on the [type](#)⁵ and initial [stage](#)⁶ of your cancer, as well as the type of treatment you had, and your response to that treatment.

If you have completed treatment, your doctors will still want to watch you closely. You will probably have follow-up appointments with your doctor for many years and it's important to go to all of them. During these visits, you will be asked questions about any problems you may have and may undergo exams and lab tests or imaging tests (such as MRI or CT scans) to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects. Your health care team will discuss which tests should be done and how often based on the stage of

your cancer and the type of treatment you had.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some may last for a few weeks to months, but others might last a long time. Some side effects might not even show up until years after you have finished treatment. Your doctor visits are a good time for you to ask questions and talk about any changes or problems you have noticed or concerns you have.

It's important to report any new symptoms or problems to the doctor right away. This might help your doctor help find recurrent cancer as early as possible, when cancer is small and easier to treat.

Doctor visits and tests

If there are no signs of cancer, many doctors will recommend you have a physical exam, endoscopy, and some of the other tests listed below about every 3 months for the first couple of years after treatment, then every 4 to 6 months for the next few years. People who were treated for early-stage cancers may have doctor visits less often, and people with more advanced disease might be followed more frequently.

Imaging: CT or PET scans and other [imaging tests](#)⁷ might be used to watch for recurrence or a new tumor, especially if you have new symptoms.

Blood tests: If you were treated with radiation, it might have damaged your thyroid gland. You will most likely need regular blood tests to check your thyroid function.

Dental exams: People treated with radiation may also have problems with [dry mouth](#)⁸ and tooth decay, so regular dental exams are often recommended.

Speech, hearing, and swallowing rehabilitation: Both radiation and surgery can lead to problems with speech, swallowing, and hearing. These are often checked and treated by a speech therapist after treatment (see below). You might also need to see an audiologist (a specialist in hearing loss) for devices, like a hearing aid, to improve your hearing if the treatment changed it.

Nutrition follow-up: Cancers of the nasopharynx and their treatments can sometimes cause problems such as [trouble swallowing](#)⁹, dry mouth, or even loss of teeth. This can make it hard to eat, which can lead to weight loss and weakness from poor nutrition.

After treatment, you might not gain weight or replace your protein stores as well as you should. A team of doctors and nutritionists can work with you to provide nutrition supplements and information about your individual nutritional needs. This can help you

maintain your weight and nutritional intake. Some may even need a feeding tube placed into the stomach for a short time after treatment.

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think about cancer coming back, this could happen.

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)¹⁵

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/survivorship-care-plans.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening.html
www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/recurrence.html

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