

For Your Patients: Next Steps After Treatment of Gastric Cancer

— Physical and psychological recovery and beyond

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**Gastric Cancer: The
Basics of Diagnosis,
Staging, and
Treatment**

Returning to a fulfilling life after undergoing stomach cancer treatment not only involves physical recovery, but also regaining psychological, social, and emotional

well-being.

After gastric cancer surgery, it's important to have regular appointments with oncologists, surgeons, and

other specialists to monitor your recovery and address any new health concerns, as well as to continue tests to detect potential recurrence of the cancer. The frequency and nature of follow-up depends on individual factors specific to your cancer, its treatment, and your overall health status. In general, patients are monitored every few months for 2 or 3 years after initial treatment and then less frequently until approximately 5 years from surgery.

Physicians will work with you and your family/caregivers to develop a plan for follow-up care. This may include physical exams, blood tests, imaging, or other tests to detect cancer and monitor for long-term health effects from stomach cancer or its treatment.

Working with your healthcare team to plan follow-up care can help you feel more in control and supported as you go back to your daily life after treatment. It's important to keep a record of your cancer treatments and their effects.

Stomach cancer and its treatments can cause a range of physical and psychological changes. The most common physical symptoms reported by patients after surgery (radical gastrectomy) are eating restrictions, pain, and fatigue; scarring and other skin changes, hair loss, and other physical changes can also occur. Tell your care team if you experience any physical or psychological problems, since these can interfere with your recovery and quality of life.

One practical approach to keeping track of your cancer journey is the [Survivorship Care Plan](#) of the American Society of Clinical Oncology. This includes a summary of cancer treatments and any long-term and late (delayed) side effects of treatment, such as numbness, vomiting, and poor appetite. The care plan also highlights symptoms that should prompt you to

contact your primary care physician, who will be monitoring your general health after treatment. Your doctors can assist with completing the treatment details.

A healthy diet is an important part of recovering your health. Stomach cancer can lead to nutritional challenges, especially after surgery, which changes the structure and function of the gastrointestinal tract. Many patients report being unable to eat certain foods and having to eat smaller amounts of food at a time.

It's important to ensure that you are meeting your nutritional requirements. A nutritionist or dietitian may help create a meal plan based on your preferences. Specific restrictions in your diet after surgery should also be discussed with your doctors. In general, it is often reasonable to focus on a healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and minimize intake of red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods. Avoid alcohol, or at least limit your consumption to no more than one drink a day for women or two a day for men.

Having part or all of the stomach removed can sometimes cause nausea, diarrhea, sweating, and flushing after eating, since food passes quickly into the

intestine -- a phenomenon called "dumping syndrome," which can be managed with dietary/lifestyle modifications and medication.

Digestive issues do generally improve over time. In general, eating smaller meals of high-protein food 6-8 times a day, chewing food thoroughly, and drinking fluids between meals rather than with them can help you avoid feeling too full, and lower the risk of post-surgical symptoms and difficulties.

Remaining physically active also contributes to quality

...maintaining physical activity also contributes to quality of life and may also offer opportunities for social interactions. In many cases, help from a physical or occupational therapist is needed to help patients remain active or return to physical activity.

Most patients also experience psychological symptoms such as stress, anxiety, fear, and shock in the course of their illness. Cancer care, therefore, includes psychological support as well as medical therapy to help manage many of these problems.

Maintain your social support system by staying in touch with friends and family, and consider joining a survivors' support group. Staying positive and well-informed and working with your cancer care team to improve your health as you recover can all increase your sense of control as well as quality of life.

Read previous installments in this series:

[*For Your Patients: What Is Gastric Cancer?*](#)

For Your Patients: Zeroing in on the Risk Factors for Stomach Cancer

For Your Patients: Should You Be Screened For Stomach Cancer?

For Your Patients: Here's How Stomach Cancer Is Diagnosed

For Your Patients: Navigating Gastric Cancer Takes a Team Approach

For Your Patients: Understanding Your Treatment Options

For Your Patients: A Look at Promising New Treatments for Gastric Cancer

For Your Patients: Understanding Stomach Cancer Recurrence

"Medical Journeys" is a set of clinical resources reviewed by physicians, meant for the medical team as well as the patients they serve. Each episode of this journey through a disease state contains both a physician guide and a downloadable/printable patient resource. "Medical Journeys" chart a path each step of the way for physicians and patients and provide continual resources and support, as the caregiver team navigates the course of a disease.

Download Patient Handout



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