

Endometrial Cancer: After Treatment

Information and resources for women who have completed treatment for endometrial cancer



This material was developed by the MUHC Cancer Care Transition of Care Program team and the MUHC Gynecologic Oncology team. Special thanks to Tiffany Glodoviza and Angela Priess, students in the Masters in Nursing Program at McGill University, for their work on developing the booklet's content and the patient partners who shared their feedback on the booklet.

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is for women with endometrial cancer who have finished treatment (surgery and/or radiotherapy). You may have questions about what comes next.

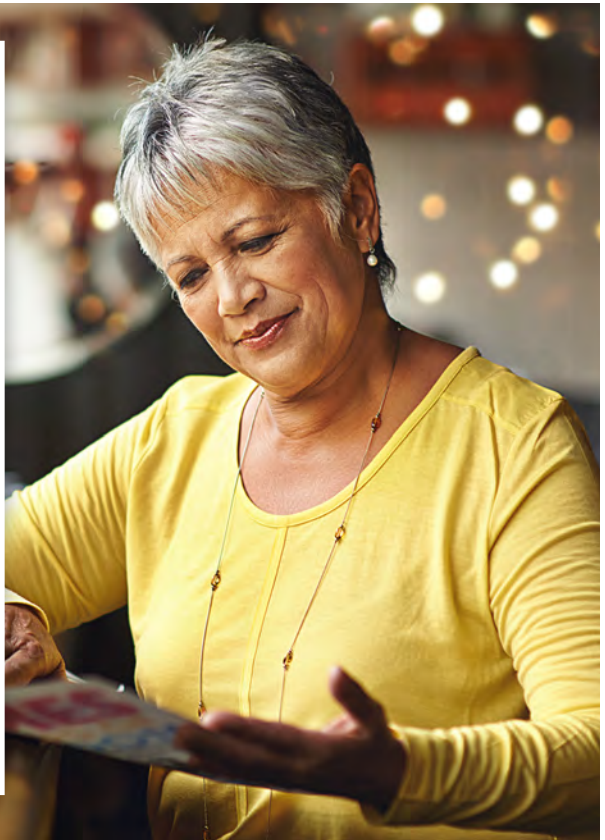
This booklet will help you to:

- Know what to expect now that you have completed your treatment
- Manage side effects caused by your treatment
- Explain your emotions
- Know what to do to live a healthier lifestyle
- Share your feelings with family and loved ones
- Plan your return to work
- Find support

Some topics in this booklet may not affect you. Feel free to read only what is important to you. Throughout the booklet, you will notice some words in bold. This is meant to draw your attention to these important medical terms or key messages. We have also included a section at the end with more information for each topic.

The information in this booklet is for educational purposes. It does not replace medical care or the advice of health care professionals. Contact a qualified health care professional if you have questions about your care.

This booklet complements information in the “Life After Cancer Treatment” by The Canadian Cancer Society.



NEXT STEPS

FOLLOW-UP PLAN

Your MUHC oncology team will share your follow-up care plan with your gynecologist and your family doctor. Together, they will monitor your health and wellbeing. Your MUHC oncology team will also give you a copy of your care plan. It will include your follow-up schedule and a summary of your treatments.

FOLLOW-UP VISITS

You will have follow-up visits with your gynecologist and your MUHC oncology team.

During these follow-up visits, your doctor will:

- Ask if you have any **symptoms**
- Do a pelvic exam
- Do other tests if needed

**If you or your doctors notice a problem, finding it early can help.
That's why it is important to go to your appointments.**



REMEMBER TO:



- Ask your doctor questions (if you have any)
- Discuss any symptoms or worries you may have
- Continue to see your family doctor at least once a year, or more often if recommended

REDISCOVERING WELLNESS

After your diagnosis, you may have put things aside to focus on your health situation. Take your time to regain your strength and process what you have been through. This is part of rediscovering wellness. Ask yourself what is important to you now. You may realize that you are not the same as when you first started your journey. There may be changes in your life.

Remember that cancer affects much more than your physical health. It may affect your social life and your mental health. Some of these changes may not end when your treatment ends. In fact, for some people, the impact of these changes may increase at the end of their treatment.

Adjusting to life after cancer, and finding a “new normal” may take time for you, your family, and your loved ones. No two people are the same. You may take more time or less time to find a routine that works for you. To help come to terms with your new normal, read the “Managing side effects” section of this booklet.

Now that you have reached this part of your journey:

- Be patient with yourself and your family
- Expect that there may be changes in your daily life
- Ask for help if you need
- Be honest with the people around you about how you are feeling

FINDING MEANING AFTER CANCER TREATMENT

Your experience with cancer may make you question many things – your spirituality, your outlook on life, or your purpose. You may want to find a deeper understanding of what you’ve been through. If you are struggling with these feelings, you are not alone. Other patients who have finished their treatment have shared their stories in “Finding meaning after cancer treatment” in the “Life After Cancer” booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society. Reading what they have been through can be helpful.

You may also visit the Cedars CANSupport website at www.cansupport.ca to get more information on this topic.

MANAGING THE EFFECTS OF THE TREATMENT

SIDE EFFECTS AND LATE EFFECTS

You may have **side effects**, which are changes your body experiences because of the cancer treatment. After finishing your treatment, you may also experience **late effects**.

Most side effects happen during or just after your treatment and usually last a short time. Examples are feeling tired or losing your appetite.

Late effects are also caused by the treatment. They can happen months after you have finished your treatment. In some cases, they might not go away.

Your follow-up care plan has a list of possible side effects and late effects. You will get a copy of the care plan at your follow-up visit.

FATIGUE

Fatigue is when you feel tired and have no energy. It can be physical or mental. Fatigue is the most common symptom for people with cancer and the most common **side effect** of cancer treatment. Fatigue usually improves after cancer treatment, but for some patients, it may continue for months or years (**late effect**).



If you are fatigued, you may:

- Feel whole-body tiredness or weakness
- Feel exhausted even after sleeping
- Find it difficult to concentrate
- Have less interest in things you enjoy
- Have periods of energy and then lose it suddenly



What can you do?

You can manage your energy:

Be physically active:

- Talk to your doctor to find out when you can start exercising. Most people can begin by walking several times a week. Gradually increase the distance and number of walks.
- Practice relaxing activities such as breathing exercises, yoga, **mindfulness***, or listening to soothing music.

**Mindfulness is an activity that focuses on being aware of your thoughts without judging yourself or feeling the need to act. It often involves controlling your breathing, focusing on the present, and clearing your mind of the past or the future.*

Plan and organize:

- Plan to do activities when you have the most energy.
- Plan activities that are fun.
- Plan activities that have places where you can sit.
- Ask friends or family to help with chores (cooking, running errands, doing laundry).
- Switch from tasks that use lots of energy to those that use less.

Pace yourself:

- Rest before you get tired. This may mean stopping in the middle of a task.

Positioning:

- Change your position to lessen your fatigue. For example, try sitting on a stool while cooking or washing dishes.

Prioritize:

- Choose the activities that are most important to you and do them first.

Watch what you eat and drink:

- Try eating 5 to 6 small meals a day instead of 3 big meals. This helps keep your body energized throughout the day. Read Canada's Food Guide for recommendations about food groups and portion sizes.
- Drink lots of fluids. Most people should drink between 6–8 cups of fluids each day.

Organize childcare:

- Use daycare programs if available. Ask friends or family for help when needed.
- Involve children in chores around the house.

Get enough sleep:

- Rest when you feel tired and take a short nap during the day if you need to. Be careful not to nap too late in the day. This could make it more difficult to sleep at night.
- Assess your sleeping environment and make changes if possible. See the section "Sleep Problems" for tips.



What can help?

Consider joining a support group for people with cancer. Talking with others who have had the same problem can help you learn new ways to cope.

Speak with your family doctor or your oncology team if you spend a lot of time in bed or if your fatigue is getting worse.



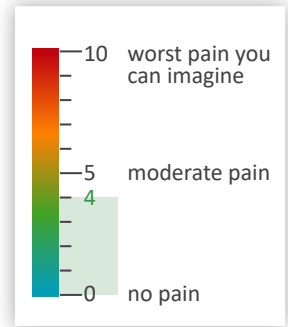
RESOURCES:

See section on “Psychological Support” and “Family Support” in this booklet for more tips.

PAIN

The pain that you may have experienced after your surgery or radiotherapy should decrease over time. The goal is to keep your pain level **below 4**. It is important to control your pain. Otherwise, this could slow down your recovery.

Read the booklet: “A Guide to Minimally Invasive Hysterectomy (removal of the uterus)” by the MUHC on how to manage pain after your surgery. Contact your treating team if your pain does not improve or worsens.



MENOPAUSE

Menopause is the point in time when a woman has no menstrual period for 12 consecutive months. Menstruation usually stops naturally, when your ovaries stop making estrogen and progesterone (hormones that control your period). For most women, this happens after 45 years old.

However, menopause can start for other reasons, for example, because of cancer treatment. This is called **treatment-induced menopause**.

Menopause may happen after:

- Surgery, when your ovaries are removed
- Radiotherapy in the pelvic area

You may experience some changes as you go through menopause.

Common symptoms include:

- Hot flashes and night sweats
- Problems sleeping or falling asleep
- Weight gain
- Vaginal dryness or itching
- Loss of bladder control
- Bladder infections
- Mood swings or getting easily irritated
- Problems with memory or concentration

Women who have gone through menopause before their treatment may notice menopausal symptoms again. These symptoms are usually temporary and should go away with time. The duration of these symptoms can vary from one woman to another.



What can you do to help with:

Hot flashes and night sweats:

- Exercise regularly
- Use fans
- Wear moisture-wicking fabrics like linen or "active-wear" materials (these draw moisture away from the skin), and dress in layers
- Avoid drinking caffeine and alcohol
- Choose cold food and drinks
- Lower the room temperature
- Use cool nightgowns, sheets, and pillows

Loss of bladder control and more bladder infections:

- Practice exercises to improve your bladder control. These are called Kegel exercises and are explained on page 21 of this booklet
- Empty your bladder often and regularly
- Limit food and drinks that can irritate your bladder, like coffee and spicy food
- Wear cotton underwear
- Drink plenty of water
- If you are experiencing more bladder infections, try drinking cranberry juice
- Urinate when you need to. Do not hold it in

Mood swings:

- Try to let go of stress
- Eat well and exercise
- Sleep well
- Avoid cannabis and alcohol



Difficulty concentrating/focusing – Some people have difficulty concentrating or focusing during menopause. If this affects your quality of life, speak with your doctor. If this is a problem for you, try these tips.



- Minimize interruptions when you are trying to complete a task
- Put a “do not disturb” sign on your door
- Put your phone on silent
- Take breaks
- Give your eyes a break from focusing on screens and go for a walk
- Try not to do many things at the same time. It helps to focus on one thing at a time, for short periods



RESOURCES:

See sections on “Sleep problems,” “Sexual health changes” and “Healthy living” in this booklet for more tips.

If your menopausal symptoms affect your daily life, speak with your treating team. Some women get relief from hormonal therapy or other types of medication.

Visit the website www.menopauseandu.ca for more information about menopause.

BOWEL CHANGES

You may have **constipation** (fewer bowel movements than usual or hard stools) after surgery, or because of the pain medications you take.



What can you do?

- Drink 8 cups or more of water every day. Liquids help keep your stool soft.
- Choose foods high in fibre. Prune, apple, grape, pear, green peas, broccoli, and brussel sprouts are good examples. These help you to have more regular bowel movements.
- Do some light exercise after each meal, like walking.
- Practice Kegel exercises.

You may have **diarrhea** (loose or liquid stool) as a side effect of radiotherapy.



What can you do?

- Try to find out which foods trigger your diarrhea.
- Eat smaller meals more often.
- Peel the skins and remove seeds of fruit and vegetables.
- Sip liquids slowly.
- Practice Kegel exercises.
- Eat more foods with soluble fibre like oatmeal, oat bran, barley, white rice, bananas, white bread, and applesauce.
- Limit drinks that have caffeine (like coffee or cola soft drinks) or alcohol.
- Limit fatty foods and spicy foods.

Speak with your MUHC oncology team if constipation or diarrhea lasts more than 2 weeks after your treatment, it is not improving, or it is getting worse.

LYMPHEDEMA (Swelling in the legs)

Your body has hundreds of tiny bean-like glands called **lymph nodes**. These nodes make up your lymphatic system. They act like filters that help drain fluid and prevent infection.

When lymph nodes are removed during surgery, or damaged by radiotherapy, this interrupts the flow of fluids in the body. When body fluids do not flow well, they can build up, and cause swelling.

This swelling is called **lymphedema**. It can happen anywhere that lymph nodes have been removed, but it often develops in the legs.



Signs and symptoms of lymphedema are:

- Swelling or puffiness in the leg
- Aches, pains, tingling, or numbness in the leg
- Difficulty moving the leg
- Skin feeling tight or hard
- Leg heaviness
- Loss of movement or loss of flexibility in the joints (knee or ankle)
- Feeling that clothes are tight



What can you do?

- Exercise: using your muscles and moving helps to circulate and drain fluid
- Reduce your weight or maintain a healthy body weight
- Call your doctor if you see any skin changes. Do not wait until your follow-up appointments

If you are diagnosed with lymphedema, your MUHC oncology team will refer you to a specialized clinic and give you more information to help you.



SLEEP PROBLEMS

You may have problems falling asleep or getting good quality sleep because of worry, hot flashes, depression, or other reasons.

It is important to get restful sleep. It can help with many symptoms like:

- Mood changes
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fatigue



What can you do?

Adjust your sleeping habits:

- Choose a regular bedtime and time to wake up
- Avoid long naps and avoid napping late in the afternoon
- Avoid alcohol, coffee, heavy, spicy or sugary foods 4 to 6 hours before bedtime
- Avoid television/phone/computer screens at least 1 hour before bedtime
- Exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous activities 1 to 2 hours before bedtime

Arrange your sleeping environment:

- A cool bedroom is often the best for sleep. Choose a comfortable room temperature
- Block out noise and light as much as possible
- Consider earplugs if your partner snores

Set your routine:

- Do a relaxing activity before bedtime such as yoga, meditation, or deep breathing
- Try not to take your worries to bed
- Write your to-do list for the next day, so you don't lie awake thinking about it
- Develop a pre-sleep routine like taking a warm bath or reading a book

If sleep problems affect your daily life, speak with your family doctor.

Limit your use of sleep medications. They should be used carefully, and only as prescribed by your doctor.

SEXUAL HEALTH CHANGES

You may experience sexual health changes as a result of your cancer treatment. If so, we can help. We know that talking about your sexual health may feel uncomfortable, but you do not need to feel shy or embarrassed. No matter what questions you have, your treating team will answer them and try to find solutions that work for you. Dealing with these issues will help with your recovery.

Intimacy and Sexuality

Cancer can affect your emotions and the way you feel about your body. Your interest in sex and relationships can also be affected. After your treatment, you may feel some of the following:

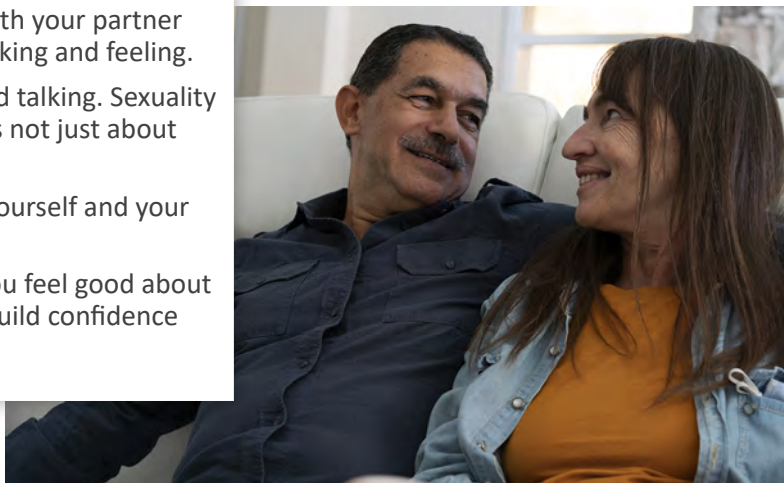
- Lower self-esteem
- Loss of femininity
- Loss of sexual interest or desire
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse

Any of these may lead you to avoid intimacy, and worry about intercourse.



What can you do?

- Communicate openly with your partner about what you are thinking and feeling.
- Spend time touching and talking. Sexuality is about connection. It is not just about sex.
- Be patient and kind to yourself and your partner as you recover.
- Focus on what makes you feel good about yourself. This can help build confidence and reduce anxiety.



Before you resume sex, consult your doctor.

Vaginal Dryness

Your vagina needs moisture to keep it elastic and healthy. Radiotherapy and menopause can cause it to produce less moisture, that can lead to vaginal dryness. This can make putting anything into the vagina uncomfortable.



What can you do?

Try a vaginal moisturizer. Vaginal moisturizers can help the tissue in the vagina keep its moisture and elasticity (stretch).

Vaginal moisturizers:

- Are available in gels, creams, and suppositories. Some examples are Replens, Repagyn and Gynatrof
- Can be used a few times each week
- Do not require a prescription
- Are non-hormonal
- Are different from lubricants. They last longer and are not usually used for sexual activity

Speak with your pharmacist to help you choose a vaginal moisturizer that is right for you.

Vaginal Stenosis

Surgery and radiation may produce scar tissue in your vagina. When this causes the vagina to tighten or become narrow, we call it **vaginal stenosis**. Vaginal stenosis may also make your vagina feel drier and more rigid (less elastic).

Treating vaginal stenosis will help make follow-up exams and sexual intercourse more comfortable.



What can you do?

Stretch the walls of the vagina.

- Depending on the treatment you have received, your MUHC oncology team may recommend using dilators. Dilators are a plastic or rubber tube-like device that helps to stretch out the vagina. You can use them at home. See “Your step-by-step guide to vaginal dilation” by the MUHC.
- You may try gentle, regular intercourse 1 to 2 times per week.

Your doctor may recommend that you try vaginal estrogens. These can lessen **vaginal atrophy** (when the vaginal walls get thinner and less stretchy). Speak with your doctor about how to apply vaginal estrogens.

Vaginal estrogens:

- Need a prescription
- Can be placed in the vagina or on the vulva



Discomfort During Sexual Intercourse

If you have vaginal dryness, penetration during sex can be painful. Painful intercourse is called **dyspareunia**. The discomfort may feel like a burning or soreness in or around the vagina.

This can happen because of the surgery, radiotherapy, or hormone changes after cancer treatment.



What can you do?

Use a lubricant:

- Choose a plain, clear, water-based gel that does not have spermicide or perfume (these can irritate the vagina.) Examples of water-based gels include Astroglide, K-Y Brand, O'My, and Liquid Silk.
- Avoid oil-based lubricants (like non-natural oils and Vaseline). These may cause infections.
- Reapply as many times as needed during sex.
- Speak with a pharmacist to help you pick a lubricant that is safe to use if you are having pain during sex or a vaginal moisturizer if you are experiencing vaginal dryness.

Speak with your partner:

- Make sure that you are aroused before vaginal sex. Your vagina expands to its full length and width only when you are aroused. Foreplay also helps moisten your vagina naturally, so the pain may not be as bad. Let your partner know this.
- If you are having vaginal sex, try a position that gives you control to move freely.



If sex is uncomfortable:

1. Tell your cancer care team or gynecologist. Do not let embarrassment keep you from getting medical care.
2. Your doctor may be able to refer you to a special therapist for pelvic physiotherapy or pelvic rehabilitation. This therapy helps women relax their vaginal muscles and manage pain during sex.
3. Kegel exercises can help you become aware of your vaginal muscles and help you to learn to relax them.



RESOURCES:

See the Support and Resources section at the end of the booklet under "Sexual Health."

WORRIES ABOUT CANCER RETURNING

After treatment, it is normal to worry about your cancer coming back. This fear may increase at times; for example, before an appointment, when you're near the cancer clinic, or when you feel ill.

Remember that you will visit your gynecologist and the MUHC oncology team at regular follow-up appointments. Please tell us how you're really feeling. Don't be afraid to share your concerns with us.



Tips on how to manage the fear of cancer returning (recurrence):

- Remember that this is a very common feeling to have after cancer treatment. Be aware of what triggers your fears.
- Practice letting your fears go. It is normal to have these thoughts. Some people use imagery or mindfulness techniques to cope with their fears.
- Express your feelings with a friend or counsellor. Being open and dealing with your emotions can help you. This may be difficult at first, but may become easier over time.
- Know what healthy behaviours can help reduce your risk of cancer.
- Control what you can. Focus on your wellbeing. Eat well, exercise, establish a routine, get enough sleep, and go to your follow-up medical visits.
- Find ways to relax. Do this regularly for a few minutes every day. Learn to practice mindfulness. Focus on the present, rather than on worries about the future or the past.
- Be informed. Know the symptoms to look out for so that you are not worried about every ache or pain.

SYMPTOMS OF POSSIBLE RECURRENCE: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

After your treatment, you may notice symptoms that concern you. Pay attention to the ones below. These symptoms may have nothing to do with a cancer recurrence. But, if they are a sign of cancer, it is better to find out early. Contact your doctor if you are concerned, especially if the symptoms are new.

Symptoms you should pay attention to:

- New lumps (masses) in your neck and groin area
- Swelling in your belly (abdominal distension)
- Swelling in your legs
- Pain in your pelvis, hips, belly, or back
- Changes in your bowel movements (diarrhea or constipation that are new and different from your usual bowel movements)
- Loss or decrease of appetite
- Feeling full quickly or having difficulty eating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Increase in need to urinate (pee) or urinating more often
- Lack of bladder control
- Inability to empty your bladder fully
- Persistent nausea and vomiting
- Fatigue (constantly feeling tired)
- Persistent cough
- Feeling short of breath

It is important to keep track of your follow-up plan and go to all your follow-up appointments.



Contact your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- Unexplained vaginal bleeding or discharge
- Blood in your urine or stool

HEALTHY LIVING

After treatment is over, there are things you can do to stay healthy. These healthy habits do not directly affect the chances of your cancer returning. However, healthy behaviours may help lessen your symptoms and help improve your quality of life. For more information, see the section “Healthy Living” in “Life After Cancer Treatment” by the Canadian Cancer Society.

Avoid smoking cigarettes, vaping, and using other tobacco products.

- Go to quebecsanstabac.ca for more information on how to stop smoking

Protect your skin from exposure to the sun and tanning beds.

- Consult “Sun Protection” by the MUHC Patient Education Office for more information

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Experts suggest that women should have 0 to 2 drinks per day and no more than 10 drinks per week.

- Go to educalcool.qc.ca for more information about healthy drinking habits
- Visit the Quebec Government’s official website for more information on changing your drinking habits

Sleep well, between 6 and 8 hours a night.

See your doctor and dentist for regular checkups.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Even if you were not physically active before cancer, you can safely add exercise and physical activity into your life. Physical activity can help with side effects such as fatigue, depression, anxiety, and sleep problems.



What can you do?

Start slowly

- If you are often tired, start with gentle activities such as stretching. Choose a time of day when you are rested and have more energy.
- When you are ready, add other activities, such as walking. This is great to start with, especially if you have not exercised regularly. Stick close to home at first and rest when you need to.
- Listen to your body and try not to push beyond your limits. Remember, you are still healing. Forcing your body beyond its limits can slow down your recovery.



Exercise safely

- Speak with your MUHC oncology team to find out when it is safe for you to start exercising.
- Do not lift more than 5 pounds for the first 4 weeks after your surgery.
- If you have swelling (lymphedema) in the abdomen, groin, or lower limbs, talk to your MUHC oncology team before starting any lower body exercises.
- If you have physical challenges, your MUHC oncology team may recommend that you see a physiotherapist. They may suggest a new way of doing an activity that is safe and meets your needs and abilities.

When are pelvic floor exercises (Kegel exercises) recommended?

If you
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have had cancer treatments that cause early menopause• Have bladder leaks when laughing, running, coughing, lifting heavy items.• Have started menopause• Are over 40• Have given birth
Why?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent urine or stools from leaking• Keep the organs above your pelvic floor in the right place• Keep good blood flow to your pelvic area which will help your vagina stay healthy• Make sexual activity more enjoyable and comfortable<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeps the vagina moist by maintaining blood flow• Strengthens the muscles around the vagina and increases friction during sex

To do a Kegel:

- Tighten or squeeze the muscles around your anus (as if trying to stop from passing urine).
- Hold the squeeze for 2–5 seconds.
- Relax for 2–5 seconds.
- Repeat this 12 to 20 times. This is one set. Do this 3 to 4 times a day.



Do not do Kegel Exercises if:

- You have just had surgery. Wait at least 6 to 8 weeks before you do pelvic floor exercises. Your body needs time to heal. Ask your oncologist when to start these exercises.
- You feel pain during sex or pelvic exams. Doing pelvic floor exercises can make this pain worse. **Wait for the pain to go away before doing Kegels.**

DIET

Eating well and maintaining healthy eating habits can have a positive impact on your quality of life. It helps to:

- Increase energy levels
- Maintain muscle strength
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Manage the side effects of treatment and speed up recovery
- Encourage wound healing and help to rebuild damaged tissues, especially after surgery or radiotherapy
- Improve your body's ability to fight infections

There are no special foods or diets that are scientifically proven to cure or control cancer. Follow the Canada's Food Guide recommendations to find out what food groups and amounts are ideal for a healthy diet. The recommendations also suggest limiting sugary drinks, processed foods, and the amount of salt in your diet.

If you are using or thinking of using complementary medications or alternative therapies, speak with your treating team first. Some therapies may not interact well with your treatments.



RESOURCES:

For more support about diet changes and recommendations, talk to your family doctor.

Montreal-based organizations that can provide more information about a healthy diet:

- [West Island Cancer Wellness Center](#) offers nutritional cooking classes.
- [Hope and Cope](#) offers a variety of classes, lectures and programs about nutrition.

For more resources about eating well, consult:

- "Healthy Living" section in "Life after Cancer Treatment" booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society
- "Eating Well When You Have Cancer" booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is part of our daily life, and everyone has different ways to manage their stress. When facing a stressful situation we often use our familiar coping mechanisms to deal with the situation. Stress can affect your emotions, mood, and even physical health.

Fortunately, there are things you can do. Lowering your stress levels can help improve your mood and give you the strength to get through the challenging times. Here is a list of activities that may help reduce your stress. Find out what works best for you.

- **Mind-body practices**, like meditation or guided imagery, can help calm your mind and reduce anxiety and stress.
- Gentle types of **physical activity**, like yoga or Tai-chi can also help relieve stress and tension. You can also look for a massage therapist who has experience working with people with cancer.
- **Creative arts** like writing, photography, drawing, painting, and music can also be healing.
- **Social activities**, for example, spending time with friends and family, can help manage stress. Enjoy time outdoors or with pets. Don't be afraid to ask for support from others. Support can come from family, friends, support groups, and online forums. Talk to people about how you are feeling. Sometimes all you need is someone to talk to.



RESOURCES:

For more support regarding reducing stress, talk to your family doctor.

Consult the “Support and Resources” section of this booklet for access to Montreal-based resources for reducing stress

See “Coping When You Have Cancer” by The Canadian Cancer Society for more ideas and activities that you can try to manage your stress.

A guide about “How to Manage Your Anxiety” by Cancer Care Ontario

“Your new normal” section in Life after Cancer Treatment booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society

EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The end of treatment can be a confusing time. You may be relieved that the treatment is finally over, but may also feel lonely, angry, worried, or sad. You may also be upset with any changes to your body. It is normal to have these feelings. If you become overwhelmed by these feelings, it is okay to ask for help.

Here are signs that you may need some help:

- You don't want to leave your house because you don't want people to see you
- You don't want to date or meet new people
- You avoid being intimate with your partner
- You won't let your partner see your scars
- You're embarrassed because you have lost or gained weight
- You feel ashamed of having cancer
- You're unable to accept yourself as you are now

The feelings you may be experiencing are normal. What you may need is to find ways to learn how to cope with these feelings. Here are some ideas that have helped others:

- Give yourself time to adjust. Everyone adapts differently. Take things at your own pace and treat yourself with compassion and kindness.
- Be open to accepting your new normal.
- Be patient. The healing process is slow. Take the time you need to rest and recover. You will improve with time. Sometimes change is so gradual that you don't notice it's happening.
- Talk to someone you trust and ask for support from your loved ones, friends, neighbours, and community.
- Find support from those who have lived similar experiences. Support groups, workshops, and online forums are opportunities to meet with others.
 - Cedars CanSupport offers free workshops, support groups, and one-to-one telephone support. See their calendar for more information
 - Canadian Cancer Society offers monthly support groups
 - Hope and Cope offers a stress reduction workshop for you and your loved ones called "Exploring the Mind-Body-Spirit Connection." They also offer several support groups and one-to-one peer support
 - Quebec Cancer Foundation has telephone peer matching and offers interactive conferences

- Seek comfort through your spirituality
- Seek counselling. A professional can help you cope with your feelings and physical changes. Ask your MUHC oncology team about the Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC available to you and your family members
- Get physically active. Exercise and physical activity can have a big impact on your mood. Participate in stress-reducing activities (see “Healthy Living” section of this booklet)
- For more information, read the section “Your feelings after cancer treatment” in “Life After Cancer Treatment” booklet by the Canadian Cancer Society

If you are having difficulty coping with change, contact your treating team.



ANXIETY

Some people may be worried or find it hard to relax after their treatments have finished. This is a common feeling after the end of the treatments. If you are anxious, you may feel that your heart is beating fast. You may also feel nervous, out of breath, or tired. If this happens often, and if it interferes with your everyday life, try some of the tips below. If you still need help, speak with your doctor.



What can you do?

- Remember that it is ok to feel worried sometimes.
- Learn what triggers your anxiety and what helps you relax.
- Try relaxing activities such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, or listening to calm music.
- Try deep breathing and relaxation exercises.



What can help?

- Reaching out to family members or friends
- Joining spiritual groups, support groups, or counsellors
- Talking with your MUHC oncology team or your family doctor



RESOURCES:

Consult the “Emotional/ Psychological Impact” section for more resources for counselling, support groups, one-to-one support, and workshops.

DEPRESSION

You may have good days and bad days as you recover. Everyone feels 'blue' or sad at times. But if the sadness stays, or if it is combined with other feelings or physical symptoms, this may be a sign of depression.

What are some signs of depression?

- Sadness
- A loss of interest in doing things
- Change in sleep patterns (not enough sleep or sleeping too much)
- Change in appetite (not eating enough or eating a lot)
- Loss of concentration
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling worthless

The stronger these feelings are or the longer they last, the more you need to pay attention to these signs. **If any of these symptoms last for more than 2 weeks, talk to your treating team.**



What can you do?

- Get enough sleep. Most people need 6–8 hours of sleep.
- Include physical activity in your daily life.
- Practice mind-body activities such as breathing techniques, yoga, or meditation.
- Ask your doctor if any of your medications might be causing your depression.
- Spend time outside.
- Spend time with family or friends.
- Join support groups and peer counselling networks.





Who can help?

Talk with your family doctor or the MUHC oncology team about how you are feeling. They may suggest counselling or medication, which may help.

TALKING TO LOVED ONES

Your cancer journey may have shifted your priorities and your sense of self, so it is natural that your relationships may also change. For instance, you may feel differently towards friends and family, or they may act differently towards you. This can sometimes make it difficult for people to talk to one another.

Here are common relationship problems and what you can do:

Family and friends are overly protective of you

People have their own ways of showing their love and support. Some people may offer more “help” than what you want or need. Or, they may be overprotective of you. Be honest about how you feel. Let them know when and how they can help you. You do not have to share everything about your cancer. But, keeping them informed and giving them something to do may make them feel involved and less worried.



Family and friends avoid you

People may not know what to say, or how to act after you’ve been diagnosed. Some people feel so uncomfortable, they avoid you completely or ignore what you’ve been through. If you are comfortable, try taking the first step. Talk to them. Tell them exactly what they can do for you, and how you want to be treated. After your treatment is over, some relationships may become less close. You may feel disappointed. Consider telling your loved ones how you feel.

Family and friends think that you should be “over it” by now

It is difficult for people to know what to expect once your treatment is over. Some may want to think about moving forward, wanting you to focus on the positive. They may assume that you will be back to “normal.” Let them know that it will take time to figure out your “new normal.” Ask them to be patient with you as you settle into this part of your journey. Be honest with them about how you are feeling.

Intimate relationships don’t feel the same

You may notice that sexuality and intimacy are different with your partner. Be open with them. Tell your partner how you are feeling. Consider getting professional counselling, it may help. For more information, read the “Intimacy and Sexuality” section of this booklet.

Family and friends need support to deal with their feelings about your cancer experience

Ask your MUHC oncology team about the Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC for family members who are having difficulty coping with your diagnosis.

Consult the “Support and Resources” section of this booklet for more resources for your loved ones.



RESOURCES:

The Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC is available to you and family members:
<https://muhc.ca/psychosocial-oncology/profile/psychosocial-oncology>

Consult the “Support and resources” section for more resources for counselling, support groups, one-to-one support, and workshops

RISK TO CHILDREN/ FAMILY MEMBERS

You may be worried that your children or other family members are more likely to get cancer because of your cancer diagnosis. Although some cancers are **hereditary** (this means that children may inherit the **genes** that cause cancer from their parents), most uterine cancers are not.

In cancers that are hereditary, your doctor may suggest **genetic** screening. This can help find out if your family members are more likely to develop cancer. The pathologist will test some tissue from your tumor. If the test results show that your tumor could be caused by something hereditary, your doctor will refer you for genetic testing. In this case, your doctor will let you know if your family members should be tested.



WHEN AND HOW TO GO BACK TO WORK

Thinking about going back to work is an important part of your after-treatment journey. You may feel excited or worried about this next step. Whatever your feelings are, going back to work will take some planning.

When you decide to go back to work depends on many things. It involves more than just your physical, psychological, or mental strength. Speak with your treating team about the right time to return to work for you. Remember that you do not need to be 100% recovered to start thinking about a plan to return to work. You may also consider working from home.

If you are considering going back to work:

Think about what you can and cannot do now

- How much energy do you have?
- Will your side effects make it difficult to work?
- How did cancer and treatment affect you physically, emotionally, and **cognitively** (your ability to reason and use your judgment)?

Think about how you will return to work

- Can you return to work gradually? For example starting with a few days a week, or a few hours a day, before moving towards full-time.
- Contact your employer to discuss changes to your workload or full-time/part-time status. Tell them if you have any restrictions.
- Contact your employer to discuss **accommodations*** needed for your return to work

**Accommodations are adaptations or changes at the workplace that can help you work. This can include doing different duties, working from home, having flexible hours, or finding a place to rest at work.*

Think about possible solutions

- Can your treating team help you find strategies to deal with your side effects?
- Can you change the parts of your job that you do not like? Can you do more of the things you do like?
- Could you return to the same job with accommodations?
- Could you work part-time or from home?
- Is retirement an option?

Think about the people or programs in your personal and work life that can help you

- Can you renegotiate household chores?
- What help does your employer offer?
- Are you eligible for services from your work insurance, such as **occupational therapy***?

**Occupational therapy is a form of therapy to help you recover or maintain your ability to do the activities you usually do daily.*

Think about how you can prepare at home

- Set a routine
- Make an activity schedule
- Slowly increase your activity/housework

Speak with your family doctor if you do not feel ready to return to work

For more information and tools to assess your work situation, visit Cancer and Work at www.cancerandwork.ca



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

An electronic copy of this booklet is also available. This will enable you to access the links listed in the Support and Resources section.

Please note that some links may no longer be available if they have been modified by the organization. If you have any problems with a link, please refer to the organization's website.

GENERAL CANCER RESOURCES

- Cedars CanSupport: <https://www.cansupport.ca>, (514) 934-4400
- Canadian Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.ca>, 1 (888) 939-3333
- Cancer Care Ontario: <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en>, (416) 217-1816
- Hope and Cope: <https://hopeandcope.ca/>, (514) 340-3616
- Quebec Cancer Foundation: <https://fqc.qc.ca/en>, 1 (800) 363-0063
- Wellspring: <https://www.wellspring.ca/> (only available in English), 1 (877) 499-9904
- West Island Cancer Wellness Center: www.wicwc.com, (514) 695-9355

FATIGUE

- Informational Booklet titled “How to Manage Cancer-Related Fatigue” with link to 7 short videos: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/cca/if-cca-managing-cancer-related-fatigue.pdf>
- Short video on Cancer Related Fatigue (includes tips on how to manage): <https://youtu.be/YTFPMYGe86s>

HEALTHY LIVING

- **Alcohol consumption**
 - <https://www.educalcool.qc.ca/>
- **Skin protection**
 - Consult “Sun Protection” by the MUHC patient education office for more information: <http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca/DATA/GUIDE/>
- **Smoking cessation:**
 - Consult Santé Montreal’s website for more information on smoking cessation: <https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/public/advice-and-prevention/smoking-cessation/>

Physical activity

- Cedars CanSupport (<https://cansupport.ca/support-groups-and-workshops/>): offer classes like yoga and reiki
- Happy Tree Yoga (www.happytreeyoga.com, (514) 806-9642): offer services at a reduced price for cancer patients
- Hope and Cope (www.hopeandcope.ca): offer a variety of courses and programs that focus on wellness in the mind, body, and spirit
- Quebec Cancer Foundation
 - Yoga and walking clubs (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/others-services>)
 - Free meeting with a certified kinesiologist who can create personalized exercise programs tailored to your fitness level
- West Island Cancer Wellness Center (www.wicwc.com): consult their monthly calendar to see the different wellness classes they offer
- Kegels: “Kegel Exercises (female)” by the MUHC: <http://muhcguides.com/module/kegels-female>

Diet

- Canada’s Food Guide: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>
- Hope and Cope offers a variety of classes, lectures and programs about nutrition
- West Island Cancer Wellness Center (<https://wicwc.com/>): offer nutritional cooking classes
- “Eating Well When You Have Cancer” booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) <https://action.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/publications/eating-well-when-you-have-cancer>
- “Healthy Living” section in “Life after Cancer Treatment” booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society

LYMPHEDEMA

- Website by Canadian Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/diagnosis-and-treatment/managing-side-effects/lymphedema/?region=qc>

PAIN

- “A Guide to Minimally Invasive Hysterectomy (removal of the uterus)” by the MUHC: http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca/DATA/GUIDE/753_en~v~minimally-invasive-hysterectomy-removal-of-uterus-surgery-guide.pdf

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Written Information

- “Coping When You Have Cancer” booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society
- “How to Manage Your Anxiety” (a guide to manage your anxiety) by Cancer Care Ontario: <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management/3981>
- “Your new normal” section in Life after Cancer Treatment booklet by The Canadian Cancer Society
- Website by Canadian Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/living-with-cancer/your-emotions-and-cancer/coping-with-anxiety-and-stress/?region=on>
- Guide to manage your depression by Cancer Care Ontario: <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management/3986>
- Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC available to you and family members: <https://muhc.ca/psychosocial-oncology/profile/psychosocial-oncology>

Activities

- Creative arts classes (writing, photography, drawing, painting, music, etc.)
 - Cedars CanSupport (<https://cansupport.ca/support-groups-and-workshops/>): offer art therapy workshops
 - Hope and Cope (<https://hopeandcope.ca/wellness/#nutrition>): offer a variety of classes and workshops to help foster your creativity
 - Quebec Cancer Foundation (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/psychological-support/art-therapy>): offer art therapy
- Guided meditation: https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&iirf_redirect=1

Support groups and one-to-one peer support

- Cedars CanSupport (<https://cansupport.ca/support-groups-and-workshops/>): offer free support groups and one-to-one telephone support
- Canadian Cancer Society

- Quebec Cancer Foundation
 - Coffee get-togethers: provide people with cancer and their loved ones the chance to share their thoughts and feelings in a warm, friendly atmosphere (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/others-services>)
 - Telephone peer matching (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/psychological-support/telephone-peer-matching>)

Counselling

- Find a psychologist on the official site of the order of psychologists:
 - <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/> (only available in French)
 - (514) 738-1223
- Find a psychologist by regions in Quebec: <https://www.bottinsante.ca/Psychologues-Quebec-1.html>
- Find therapy and counseling for you and/or your loved ones at the following Montreal based organizations:

Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC available to you and family members: (514) 934-1934 extension 45502

Association des art-thérapeutes du Québec (AATQ)

911 Jean Talon St E, Montreal, Québec H2R 1V5

(514) 990-5415

<https://aatq.org/en/>

Association Québécoise de Musicothérapie

info@musicotherapieaqm.org

www.musicotherapieaqm.org

The Applied Psychology Centre Concordia University (only available in English)

7141 Sherbrooke Street West (Loyola Campus), Psychology Building, PY-111,
Montreal, Quebec, H4B 1R6

514-848-2424 ext. 7550

apc@concordia.ca

<https://www.concordia.ca/artsci/psychology/facilities-services/apc.html>

Centre de psychologie Gouin (only available in French)

39 Boul Gouin O, Montréal, QC H3L 1H9

(514) 331-5530

<https://www.cpgouin.ca/>

Montreal Therapy Center

2100 Marlowe Ave 2nd Floor, #216, Montreal, Quebec H4A 3L5

514 244-1290

<https://www.montrealtherapy.com/>

Centre de services psychologiques UQAM (only available in French)

100 Sherbrooke St W, Montreal, QC H2X 3P2

(514) 987-0253

<https://psychologie.uqam.ca/centre-de-services-psychologiques-csp/>

Centre St-Pierre (only available in French)

1212 Rue Panet, Montréal, QC H2L 2Y7

514 524-3561 (ext.401)

<https://www.centrestpierre.org/>

Famille Nouvelle (only available in French)

4450 Rue St-Hubert #435, Montréal, QC H2J 1L4

(514) 525-0063

info@famillennouvelle.org

<https://famillennouvelle.org/nos-therapeutes/>

- Find more organizations that offer psychological support/ counselling: <https://amiquebec.org/therapy/>

Workshops

- Cedars CanSupport (<https://cansupport.ca/support-groups-and-workshops/>): offer free workshops. See their calendar for more information
- Hope and Cope (<https://hopeandcope.ca/wellness/#nutrition>): offer a stress reduction workshop for you and your loved ones titled “Exploring the Mind-Body-Spirit Connection”
- Quebec Cancer Foundation (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/psychological-support/art-therapy>): offer interactive conferences

FAMILY SUPPORT

- “Listen First: And 9 other ways to support someone with cancer” by Canadian Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/publications/Listen%20First/32100-1-NO.pdf>
- Hope and Cope (<https://hopeandcope.ca/wellness/#nutrition>): offer a stress reduction workshop for you and your loved ones titled “Exploring the Mind-Body-Spirit Connection”
- How to talk to children and teens about your diagnosis: Start The Talk: <https://startthetalk.ca/en/home>
- Psychosocial Oncology Program at the MUHC available to you and family members: <https://muhc.ca/psychosocial-oncology/profile/psychosocial-oncology>
- Quebec Cancer Foundation (<https://fqc.qc.ca/en/need-help/others-services>): offer a program called “Coffee get-togethers” that provides people with cancer and their loved ones the chance to share their thoughts and feelings in a warm, friendly atmosphere
- Find psychological support/ counselling for you and/or your loved ones: <https://amiquebec.org/therapy/>
- Find therapy and counseling for you and/or your loved ones at Argyle Institute
 - o <https://argyleinstitute.org/>
 - o 514 931-5629
- Find therapy and counseling for you and/or your loved ones at Montreal Therapy Center
 - o <https://www.montrealtherapy.com/>
 - o 514 244-1290

RETURNING TO WORK

- Cancer and Work: www.Cancerandwork.ca

SEXUAL HEALTH

Menopause

- “Menopause and U”: <https://www.menopauseandu.ca/>

Intimacy and Sexuality

- “Cancer, Sex, and the Female Body” at the website <https://www.cancer.org>
- “Sex, Intimacy and Cancer” by The Canadian Cancer Society
- “Woman Cancer Sex” by Dr. Anne Katz: <http://www.drannekatz.com/project/woman-cancer-sex/>
- Sex and couple therapy services: www.sexandcoupletherapy.com

Vaginal dryness

- “Know How to Use Vaginal Moisturizers and Lubricants” by University Health Network: https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Know_How_to_Use_Vaginal_Moisturizers_Lubricants.pdf

Vaginal stenosis

- “Your Step-by-Step Guide to Vaginal Dilation” by the MUHC: http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca/DATA/GUIDE/781_en~v~taking-care-of-vaginal-stenosis-after-treatment.pdf

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