

CANCER DIAGNOSIS RESOURCE PACKET

advice + information for those diagnosed with cancer



YOUR DIAGNOSIS-TREATMENT GUIDE

INFORMATION COMPILED BY
THE BLOCK CANCER TEAM



A cancer diagnosis is going to shock your world in a way that no one can prepare you for. I hope this packet provides you with the resources, advice, answers, and hope you need to start your journey battling cancer.

All of the information provided in this file is first hand research and advice my family received while my Dad was battling stage 4 pancreatic cancer.

By no means is this packet meant to replace the advice your healthcare provider has given you. This is simply a supplemental resource that I hope will bring you some ease and comfort during an extremely overwhelming time in your life.

Take a deep breath.

Welcome to Block Cancer. I hope you feel safe, supported, and seen in this community.

You are family here.

-elizabeth



You are not alone.

There is no right or wrong way to process a diagnosis. You're likely scared and anxious. You feel as though your new identity is "cancer patient." Your world has been turned upside down.

Fighting cancer doesn't mean you're always positive and brimming with hope. Some days you'll be furious, sad, and confused, and that's okay. Be whatever you need to be each day. Simply remember that cancer is not a sentence, it's not an identity, and it's *nowhere near* as strong as you are.

Whether you want to share your diagnosis with your family or keep it to yourself, do whatever it is that feels right to *you*.

If you decide to share your diagnosis with family and/or close friends, be *crystal clear* about your feelings towards them sharing (or not sharing) the news. My dad was emphatic about us keeping his diagnosis private, whereas others are much more open about their diagnosis. Simply remember this is *your fight*, and you are in control.





BASIC FACTS

WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer is a group of as many as 200 different diseases characterized by the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the body. Normal cells can become abnormal when they are exposed to carcinogens such as radiation, or particular drugs or chemicals. They can also turn malignant when they are attacked by certain viruses. Once cells become malignant, they multiply rapidly. They form masses called tumors that invade nearby tissue and interfere with normal bodily functions and have a tendency to spread (or metastasize) to other parts of the body.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF CANCER?

STAGE 1: The cancer is localized to a small area and hasn't spread to lymph nodes or other tissues

STAGE 2: The cancer has grown, but it hasn't spread.

STAGE 3: The cancer has grown larger and has possibly spread to lymph nodes or other tissues.

STAGE 4: The cancer has spread to other organs or areas of your body. This stage cancer is also referred to as metastatic or advanced cancer.

***STAGE ZERO*:** Cancers in Stage 0 are usually treatable and considered pre-cancerous by most healthcare providers.

TYPES OF CANCER TREATMENT

SURGERY: The physical removal of a malignant tumor. Surgery is the oldest and most frequently used form of cancer treatment. It is most effective when the cancer is small and localized.

RADIATION- Radiation destroys cells and can come in two different forms – internal and external. With internal radiation, a radioactive substance (ie radium) is put into the body by means of a pill, injection, or insertion in a sealed container. In external radiation, a machine sends x-rays or gamma rays into the tumor. Radiation is often used alone in cases where a tumor is unsuitable for surgery or particularly receptive to destruction through radiation. It may also be used in conjunction with surgery (before and after) and sometimes with chemotherapy.

CHEMOTHERAPY: Chemotherapy kills cancer cells through the use of drugs or hormones. Taken either orally or through injection (port), chemotherapeutic agents are used to treat a wide variety of cancers. Chemotherapy is an established way to destroy hard to detect cancer cells that have spread and are circulating through the body.

IMMUNOTHERAPY: Immunotherapy uses the body's own immune system to destroy cancer cells. This form of treatment is still being intensively studied in clinical trials and is only available to certain cancer patients. The various immunological agents used include substances produced by the body as well as in-lab.

CLINICAL TRIALS: Clinical Trials are the testing of investigational treatments done in highly regulated and carefully controlled patient studies. Clinical trials are responsible for numerous advances in cancer treatment and provide scientific proof that new therapies are safe and effective for patients.

HORMONE THERAPY: Hormone Therapy is a type of treatment that slows or stops the growth of breast and prostate cancers. It can be received orally, injected, or through surgery. Hormone therapy can make a tumor smaller before surgery or radiation, lower the risk that cancer will come back after the main treatment, and destroy cancer cells that have returned or spread to other parts of your body. Hormone therapies are a type of targeted therapy that can work in two ways. Some hormone therapies prevent your body from making specific hormones, while others prevent the hormones from acting on your cells, including cancer cells.

TARGETED THERAPY: Targeted therapy is a type of cancer treatment that targets the changes in cancer cells that help them grow, divide, and spread. Most types of targeted therapy help treat cancer by interfering with specific proteins that help tumors grow and spread throughout the body. It helps your immune system destroy cancer cells, it stops cancer cells from growing by interrupting signals that cause them to grow and divide without order, it stops signals that help form blood vessels, and it delivers cell-killing substances to cancer cells.



HELPFUL LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER
PRO TIP PRINT THIS PAGE AND BRING IT TO YOUR DOCTOR VISITS.

- What kind of cancer do I have? Where is it? Where has it spread?
- Do I need any other tests before we decide on treatment?
- What treatment options do you suggest and why? What are the differences?
- Should I consider taking part in a clinical trial?
- What is the goal of my treatment? To cure or control?
- How long does treatment last?
- What are the names of the drugs I'll take or the treatments I'll receive?
- What are the risks and side effects of treatment?
- Why do I need blood tests and how often will I need them?
- How will we gauge if the treatment is working?
- What kind of changes will I need to make in my family, work, exercise, leisure, sex life etc?
- Will I be able to work out during treatment?
- Are there foods I should or shouldn't eat? Can I drink alcohol during treatment?
- Who is in charge of my treatment plan?
- Will I be able to have children after treatment?
- What is our treatment plan if the cancer comes back?
- How can I contact you if I have a question or concern?
- Will I have to take time away from work? If I do, what will happen with my benefits?
- Will my friends and family need to take time away from work to be with me?
- Will my insurance pay for these treatments?
- Will my insurance cover the cost of medicines?
- How much will I have to pay?
- If insurance won't pay for my treatment, are there programs that can help?
- Do I qualify for disability benefits?
- How does my diagnosis affect my life insurance?
- Who do I call to talk about what my insurance will cover?



WAYS TO LOVE YOURSELF DURING TREATMENT

Practice relaxing . This can be through yoga, meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy, breathing techniques, or massage.

Eat nourishing, whole foods.

Create a healing, holistic environment. Surround yourself with beautiful plants, flowers, art, colors, scents, and images that bring you joy and peace.

Share your true feelings with family, friends, a spiritual advisor, or a counselor.

Keep a journal, read a book, learn a craft, play a game, and keep your mind active.

When faced with a difficult decision, list the pros and cons for each choice.

Find a source of spiritual support.

Set aside time to be alone. Take a bath. Go for a walk. Meditate. Sit outside in the sun. Go to your happy place. Breathe.

Remain involved with work and leisure activities as much as you can.

Be ready to say no. This is the time to focus on you.

Love yourself. Look in the mirror and see how stunning, strong, and resilient you are. Appreciate yourself for showing up every day, especially on the hard days.



YOUR NEW FAVORITE THINGS

ITEMS

- Ginger hard candies (help with nausea and treatment side effects)
- Calendula lotion for radiation burns
- Heating pad or heated blanket
- Chapstick in every pocket
- Journal
- Port shirt
- Beanies/hats/chemo headwear
- Sippy cup with straw
- Organic, ultra-soft wash cloths (great for sensitive skin)
- Organic hand creams
- Honey sticks
- Weighted eye pillow
- Coloring books
- Healing crystals
- Fuzzy, warm socks
- Soft gloves
- Lemon-ginger tea

BOOKS

- *Picture Your Life After Cancer* by Karen Barrow
- *Inward* by Yung Pueblo
- *Kitchen Table Wisdom* by Rachel Naomi Remen
- *The Emperor of All Maladies* by Siddhartha Mukerjee
- *Bald in the Land of Big Hair* by Joni Rodgers
- *My Grandfathers Blessing* by Rachel Naomi Remen
- *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chödrön
- *The Cancer Revolution* by Leigh Erin Connealy
- *Cancer Vixen* by Marisa Acocella Marchetto
- *No Hair Don't Care* by Shaquita Estes
- *Tuesday's with Morrie* by Mitch Albom
- *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* by Joe Dispenza
- *Cancer Made Me a Shallower Person* Miriam Engelberg
- *Cancer and Fishnet Stockings* by Maryann Grau
- *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi
- *Into the Magic Shop* by James Doty
- *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coer
- *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow



Nutrition plays a crucial role in supporting the body during cancer treatment and recovery. Here are several reasons why nutrition is important while fighting cancer:

- **Maintaining overall health:** Cancer and its treatments can put a significant strain on the body, affecting the immune system, metabolism, and overall health. Adequate nutrition provides the body with essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and energy needed to support vital functions and help fight the disease.
- **Managing treatment side effects:** Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and surgery can cause various side effects that affect appetite, digestion, and nutrient absorption. Proper nutrition can help manage these side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, taste changes, and loss of appetite, by providing appropriate nutrients and promoting optimal digestion and absorption.
- **Supporting immune function:** Cancer and its treatments can weaken the immune system, making the body more susceptible to infections and impairing its ability to heal. Good nutrition supports immune function by providing nutrients like vitamins A, C, E, zinc, selenium, and omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for immune cell function and antioxidant protection.
- **Enhancing strength and energy:** Cancer and its treatments can lead to muscle wasting, weight loss, fatigue, and weakness. Proper nutrition, including adequate protein intake, can help preserve muscle mass, promote healthy weight maintenance or gain, and provide the necessary energy levels to carry out daily activities and support the healing process.

- **Promoting tissue repair and recovery:** Cancer treatments can damage healthy cells and tissues in the body. Nutrients like protein, vitamins, and minerals are essential for tissue repair and recovery. Adequate nutrition can support wound healing, reduce the risk of infections, and improve overall recovery after surgery or other treatments.
- **Optimizing treatment outcomes:** Good nutrition can help optimize treatment outcomes by improving tolerance to therapies, reducing treatment delays or interruptions, and enhancing the effectiveness of certain treatments. It can also improve the body's ability to withstand higher treatment doses when necessary.

It's important to note that the nutritional needs and recommendations may vary depending on the type of cancer, individual health status, treatment plan, and other factors. Therefore, it is crucial to consult with a registered dietitian or healthcare professional specializing in oncology to develop a personalized nutrition plan that suits individual needs during cancer treatment.



CANCER FIGHTING FOODS

While there is no single "best" food that can cure cancer, a healthy and balanced diet can provide essential nutrients to support the body during cancer treatment and recovery. Here are some general guidelines for choosing nutritious foods while fighting cancer:

- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables: Aim for a colorful assortment of fruits and vegetables, as they are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber. Include berries, leafy greens, cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage), citrus fruits, tomatoes, and other nutrient-dense options.
- Include lean protein sources: Opt for lean protein sources such as skinless poultry, fish, eggs, legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas), and tofu. Protein is important for tissue repair, immune function, and maintaining muscle mass.
- Choose whole grains: Incorporate whole grains like brown rice, whole wheat bread, quinoa, oats, and whole grain pasta. They provide fiber, vitamins, minerals, and sustained energy.
- Focus on healthy fats: Include sources of healthy fats, such as avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil. These provide essential fatty acids and can support overall health.
- Stay hydrated: Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated, especially if you experience side effects like dry mouth or nausea.
- Eat small, frequent meals: If you have a reduced appetite or experience digestive issues, eating smaller, more frequent meals throughout the day may be more manageable. Focus on nutrient-dense foods to ensure you're getting essential nutrients.
- Modify textures as needed: If swallowing or chewing becomes difficult due to treatment side effects, consider adapting food textures. For example, you can puree foods, choose softer options, or use liquids like soups and smoothies.
- Manage treatment side effects: Certain foods may help alleviate treatment side effects. For instance, ginger or peppermint may help with nausea, while bland, easy-to-digest foods like bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast (BRAT diet) may be suitable during digestive upset.
- Limit processed foods and added sugars: Minimize consumption of processed and sugary foods, as they provide little nutritional value and may contribute to inflammation and weight gain.
- Individualize your diet: Cancer and its treatments vary widely, so it's crucial to consult with a registered dietitian who specializes in oncology. They can assess your specific needs, consider your treatment plan and any side effects, and provide personalized dietary recommendations.

SIDE EFFECTS OF TREATMENT

including but not limited to:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Skin problems
- Hair loss
- Nausea
- Oral/dental problems
- Brain fog
- Cancer pain
- Depression
- Bleeding and bruising
- Sexual health issues
- Urinary and bladder problems
- Sleep problems

Note about your treatment plan: *always* get a second opinion. No reputable physician will question your right to a second opinion.



FOODS FOR TREATMENT SIDE EFFECTS

- **Ginger:** Ginger has long been used to alleviate nausea and vomiting, common side effects of chemotherapy. It can be consumed as ginger tea, ginger candies, or added to dishes as a spice.
- **Peppermint:** Peppermint has soothing properties that can help alleviate nausea and promote digestion. Peppermint tea or sucking on peppermint candies may provide relief.
- **Bananas:** Bananas are gentle on the stomach and provide easily digestible carbohydrates, potassium, and fiber. They can be helpful in managing diarrhea, which can be a side effect of certain cancer treatments.
- **Rice:** Plain white rice can be easy to digest and may help alleviate diarrhea by providing binding properties and bulk to the stool.
- **Applesauce:** Applesauce is another food that can help manage diarrhea. It provides soluble fiber and can help firm up loose stools.
- **Soups and broths:** Warm, clear broths and soups can be comforting and hydrating. They provide fluids, electrolytes, and some nutrients, making them beneficial during times of reduced appetite or difficulty swallowing.
- **High-fiber foods:** Foods rich in fiber, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, can help prevent or relieve constipation, a common side effect of certain cancer treatments. Adequate fluid intake is also important when consuming high-fiber foods.
- **Cold or frozen foods:** Cold or frozen foods like ice chips, popsicles, or frozen fruit can help soothe mouth sores and provide hydration when it is difficult to eat or drink.
- **Protein-rich foods:** Consuming adequate protein is important for maintaining muscle mass and promoting healing. Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, legumes, and tofu are good sources of protein that can support recovery.
- **Hydration:** Staying hydrated is crucial during cancer treatment. In addition to water, you can include hydrating foods like watermelon, cucumbers, soups, smoothies, and herbal teas.



MENTAL HEALTH

Dealing with a cancer diagnosis and undergoing treatment is exhausting and emotionally taxing, and it's essential to prioritize your mental health during this time. Here are some tips for supporting mental well-being during cancer treatment:

- **Seek emotional support:** Reach out to loved ones, friends, or support groups who can provide a listening ear, empathy, and understanding. Sharing your feelings and experiences with others who have gone through similar situations can be comforting and validating.
- **Consider professional support:** If you find that your emotional distress is significantly impacting your daily life, consider seeking professional help from a therapist, counselor, or psychologist experienced in working with cancer patients. They can provide guidance, coping strategies, and support tailored to your needs.
- **Educate yourself:** Learn about your specific type of cancer, treatment options, and expected side effects. Understanding the process can help alleviate anxiety and empower you to make informed decisions about your care.
- **Practice self-care:** Engage in activities that promote relaxation, stress reduction, and self-care. This may include practicing mindfulness or meditation, engaging in gentle exercise or yoga, listening to music, reading, or enjoying hobbies that bring you joy.

- **Maintain social connections:** Stay connected with family and friends, as social support can have a positive impact on mental health. Engage in activities that you enjoy together, whether it's going for walks, watching movies, or simply having conversations.
- **Express your emotions:** Find healthy outlets to express your emotions, such as journaling, art, or music. Writing down your thoughts and feelings or engaging in creative activities can provide a sense of release and self-expression.
- **Prioritize rest and sleep:** Adequate rest and sleep are crucial for physical and mental well-being. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine and create a comfortable sleep environment to support quality sleep.
- **Communicate with your healthcare team:** Maintain open and honest communication with your healthcare team regarding your mental and emotional well-being. They can provide resources, referrals, or interventions to support your mental health during treatment.
- **Accept support from others:** Allow yourself to receive help from others when needed. Accepting support from loved ones or community resources can alleviate stress and reduce the burden you may feel during treatment.
- **Be patient and kind to yourself:** Remember that it's normal to experience a range of emotions during cancer treatment, including fear, sadness, anger, or uncertainty. Be patient with yourself, practice self-compassion, and allow yourself to process these emotions at your own pace.

If you are struggling with severe mental health symptoms, such as persistent depression, anxiety, or thoughts of self-harm, it's important to seek immediate professional help from a mental health provider or contact a helpline in your country.

Always consult with your healthcare team for personalized advice and guidance on managing mental health concerns during cancer treatment.



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: provides 24/7 support for individuals in distress or at risk of suicide. Call 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: provides 24/7 support for individuals in crisis via text message. Text HOME to 741741

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): provides education, support, and advocacy for individuals and families affected by mental illness. Visit nami.org.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): provides information, resources, and treatment options for individuals struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues. Visit samhsa.gov

Mental Health America: provides information, resources, and advocacy for individuals and families affected by mental health concerns. Visit mentalhealthamerica.net

Therapy and counseling: a mental health professional, such as a therapist or counselor, can provide support, guidance, and treatment for a wide range of mental health concerns.

Support groups: many organizations offer support groups for individuals and families affected by mental health concerns. Google local support groups in your area to find one closest to you.



CANCER SUPPORT RESOURCES

It's important to note that the type and level of support needed may vary for each individual. Some people may require more emotional support, while others may benefit from practical assistance or information. Support can come from various sources, including family, friends, support groups, healthcare professionals, and dedicated cancer support organizations. Below are a few channels of support you can explore during your cancer fighting journey.

- Cancer Support Community (www.cancersupportcommunity.org): This organization offers free support services, including support groups, educational workshops, online communities, and counseling. They have local affiliates across the United States and a helpline for additional support.
- American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org): The American Cancer Society provides a wide range of resources, including information about different types of cancer, treatment options, support programs, and a helpline that offers information and support 24/7.
- CancerCare (www.cancercare.org): CancerCare offers free support services, including counseling, support groups, educational workshops, financial assistance, and publications. They provide support both online and over the phone.
- Livestrong (www.livestrong.org): Livestrong provides support services, educational resources, and a navigation program to help individuals affected by cancer navigate their cancer journey. They offer one-on-one support and assistance in finding local resources.

- National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov): The National Cancer Institute provides comprehensive information on cancer research, clinical trials, treatment options, and supportive care. They have resources for patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals.
- Cancer.Net (www.cancer.net): Cancer.Net, from the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), offers reliable and up-to-date information on various cancer types, treatment options, coping strategies, and resources for patients and caregivers.
- Macmillan Cancer Support (www.macmillan.org.uk): Macmillan Cancer Support is a UK-based organization that provides practical, emotional, and financial support for people affected by cancer. They offer a helpline, online community, and various support services.
- Gilda's Club (www.gildasclub.org): Gilda's Club offers support groups, workshops, and social activities for people living with cancer and their families. They have local chapters across the United States and Canada.
- Online Communities and Forums: Online communities and forums such as Cancer Support Communities' CancerConnect (www.cancerconnect.com) and Inspire (www.inspire.com) provide platforms for individuals affected by cancer to connect, share experiences, seek support, and exchange information.

Remember to also inquire about local cancer support organizations, hospitals, and community centers in your area, as they may offer additional resources and programs.



TIPS FROM TED

A few tips from my dad, Ted, during his battle against stage 4 pancreatic cancer:

Rest as much as you can

Eat when you can eat

Shave your head and embrace it

Spend as much quality time with family as possible

Get outside and go for a drive

Write handwritten letters to your family

Express how you truly feel

Say "I love you"

Lean on people and accept their help

Accept that life is tough, but so are you

Smile and laugh

Appreciate the small victories in each day

Share stories with your loved ones

Always call, don't text

Realize that each day is a gift, no matter how hard

Above everything else, love yourself



I completely understand how overwhelming a cancer diagnosis can feel. I am here to remind you that you are strong, resilient, and capable of facing this journey head-on. Your positive mindset and determination can make a significant difference in your fight. Every day, medical advancements are being made, and there are numerous treatment options available to you. Surround yourself with a strong support system of loved ones who believe in you and your ability to overcome this bump in the road. Remember that you are not alone on this journey, as there are healthcare professionals, support groups, and resources ready to provide guidance, comfort, and encouragement. Focus on taking one step at a time, celebrating small victories, and cherishing moments of joy amidst the challenges. Embrace self-care practices that bring you peace and nourish your well-being. Stay positive, believe in yourself, and never underestimate the strength and resilience within you. Together, we will fight, overcome, and emerge stronger on the other side. Block Cancer will always be here for you, and I hope this packet helped you in some way, big or small.

With nothing but love and warmth,
Elizabeth + the Block Cancer team

