

Thriving in **Long-Term Survivorship**

to **B**
My
Soul



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ENGAGE_Q
ESGQ | European Network of Gynaecological
Cancer Advocacy Groups

OBJECTIVE



Encourage patients to embrace long-term survivorship by focusing on personal growth, well-being, and a redefinition of life post-treatment.

01

What comes next?



UNDER-
STANDING
LONG-TERM
SURVIVORSHIP

Survivorship is more than just living beyond cancer — it's about **reclaiming your life, redefining your sense of self, and embracing new opportunities for growth.** Long-term survivorship comes with both challenges and possibilities, and while some days may feel uncertain, this phase also offers the chance to thrive in new and meaningful ways.

Many survivors experience a mix of relief, gratitude, and lingering worries. It's natural to wonder, 'What comes next?' The transition from active treatment to long-term survivorship may require emotional and physical adjustments. By prioritizing your well-being, setting personal goals, and staying engaged with your health care team, you can build a fulfilling life beyond cancer.

02



**MANAGING LONG-TERM
SIDE EFFECTS
OF GYNAECOLOGICAL
ONCOLOGY TREATMENT**

Some long-term effects of cancer treatment may not appear right away but can develop over time. Treatment can leave **lasting impacts** on both your body and mind, and it is **completely understandable** to have concerns about these changes. Recognizing them early and taking proactive steps can help you feel more in control and support your overall well-being.

You're not alone in this!

UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO EXPECT CAN EMPOWER YOU TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND IMPROVE YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

Fatigue

Your energy levels may fluctuate, so balancing rest and physical activity is key. Gentle exercises like stretching, short walks, or restorative yoga can help combat fatigue, while prioritizing sleep and stress management is essential.

Menopausal Symptoms

Hormonal changes may lead to hot flashes, mood swings, or vaginal dryness. Lifestyle adjustments, hormone therapy (if appropriate), and natural remedies like cooling techniques, deep breathing, and dietary changes can help manage symptoms.

Pelvic Pain & Sexual Health Concerns

Some survivors experience pain, tightness, or discomfort during intimacy. Speaking with a specialist, using vaginal moisturizers or dilators, and/or

engaging in pelvic floor therapy can help restore comfort and confidence.

Lymphoedema

Swelling in the legs or pelvic region may occur after lymph node removal or radiation therapy. Managing lymphedema may involve compression garments, manual lymphatic drainage therapy, gentle movement, and/or staying hydrated.

Bladder & Bowel Changes

Some survivors experience urinary incontinence, urgency, or digestive issues. Strengthening pelvic floor muscles, following a fibre-rich diet, and seeking medical advice for symptom management can be beneficial.

Cognitive Changes ('Chemo Brain')

Memory lapses, difficulty concentrating, or brain fog can persist post-treatment. Engaging in brain-stimulating activities (e.g., puzzles, reading, learning new skills);



maintaining an organized routine; and practicing mindfulness can support cognitive function.

Cardiovascular Health

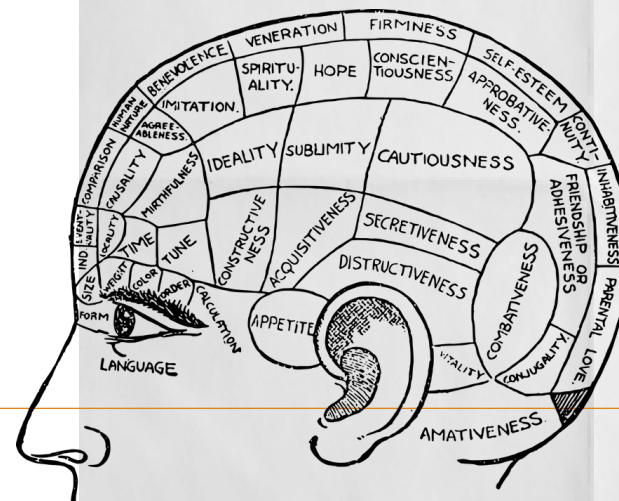
Certain treatments may increase the risk of heart disease. Having regular screenings, staying active, and eating heart-healthy foods can help protect your heart.

Bone Health

Hormonal changes and some cancer treatments can lead to bone loss or osteoporosis. Weight-bearing exercise, calcium, and vitamin D are important for bone strength.

Metabolic Changes

Some survivors experience weight gain, insulin resistance, or metabolic shifts. A balanced diet and mindful eating can support long-term health.



03



PRIORITIZING
PHYSICAL
HEALTH

Taking care of your body after treatment is essential to long-term well-being.

Here are some key ways to support your physical health:

Stay Active

Engage in activities that match your energy level, such as walking, yoga, swimming, or light strength training. Regular movement helps maintain bone density, reduce fatigue, boost mental health, and improve overall mobility.

Nourish Your Body

A balanced diet rich in whole foods, fibre, lean proteins, and healthy fats supports overall health and recovery. Staying hydrated and incorporating anti-inflammatory foods can also aid long-term well-being.



Listen to Your Body

Recognize when you need rest, and don't feel guilty about taking breaks. Prioritizing self-care, pacing daily activities, and employing relaxation techniques can help maintain energy and well-being.

Routine Health Screenings

Regular follow-ups with your health care team help monitor for recurrence, assess overall health, and manage long-term side effects. Stay proactive by discussing any new or persistent symptoms with your doctor.



04

SUPPORTING YOUR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Caring for your mental health and emotional well-being is just as important as supporting your physical health — because, very often, it is the **mind and emotions that create the biggest barriers to physical recovery**. Stress, anxiety, unresolved grief, or a sense of hopelessness can drain your energy, disrupt sleep, weaken the immune system, and make it harder for the body to heal.



These issues can also hold you back from engaging in the very habits that would support your recovery — such as moving your body regularly, maintaining healthy routines, or working in partnership with your medical team.

When you take time to nurture your emotional world — by processing feelings, identifying healthy coping strategies, and cultivating hope and meaning — you create the inner conditions your body needs to heal and thrive. A supported mind can guide healthy choices, sustain motivation, and make it easier to stay consistent with daily habits that protect your health. Emotional care is not separate from physical healing; it is the foundation that allows your body's strength to grow.

**THRIVING IN
SURVIVORSHIP
IS NOT JUST
ABOUT
PHYSICAL
HEALTH —
IT'S ABOUT
EMOTIONAL
RESILIENCE
AND SELF-
COMPASSION.**

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Here's how to foster a positive mindset:

Fear of Recurrence

This isn't just a passing worry — it can be a constant, often silent companion for many survivors. You may find yourself monitoring your body closely, feeling on high alert for every ache, twinge, or symptom. This vigilance is understandable — **your body has been through so much, and learning to trust it again takes time.** But living in a constant state of fear can be exhausting.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN FEELING THIS WAY. AND YOU'RE NOT FAILING BY BEING AFRAID.



What can help?

Employ gentle, consistent strategies like mindfulness, journaling, and focusing on what you can control. Creating a clear follow-up plan with your medical team can offer structure and reassurance.

LET YOUR LOVED ONES KNOW WHEN YOU'RE FEELING VULNERABLE — AND GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO LEAN ON THEM.

And if the fear becomes overwhelming, that's not a weakness — it's a signal that you deserve more support. Speaking with a therapist, joining a support group, or practicing grounding techniques can help you feel more in control and less alone.

Survivorship Guilt

This is another deeply human experience. Many women feel guilt for surviving when others haven't, or for receiving a second chance while carrying the weight of others' stories. These emotions can be confusing and heavy, but they are not a reflection of your worth. They reflect your empathy.

Healing isn't just about returning to the life you had before — it's about healing back into life, sometimes in a completely new form. That shift can feel disorienting. You may have built part of your identity around 'being a patient,' around appointments, treatments, and survival. **Now, moving forward might feel like stepping into a new identity, one you're still getting to know. It takes time. And that's okay.**

YOU DON'T NEED TO HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO REBUILD AT YOUR OWN PACE. AND YOU ARE STILL HEALING — EVEN IF THE TREATMENT IS OVER.



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Embracing Changes

Scars, weight fluctuations, and other physical changes are visible reminders of your strength and perseverance. Instead of viewing them as losses, try to see them as marks of resilience — proof of what you have overcome. Accepting these changes takes time, but shifting your perspective from loss to empowerment can be an important step in healing. Surround yourself with positive influences, wear clothing that makes you feel confident, and **remind yourself that your worth extends far beyond physical appearance.**

Here's how to foster a positive mindset:

Gentle Self-Care

Caring for your body in ways that make you feel good can help rebuild confidence and self-appreciation. Develop a skin care or hair care routine that nourishes you, engage in gentle movement that feels restorative rather than punishing, and allow yourself moments of rest without guilt. **Small acts of self-care can make a big impact on how you see yourself and reconnect with your body.**



Rebuilding Self-Image

Your self-worth is defined by far more than your physical appearance. Engaging in hobbies, socializing with people who uplift you, and practicing gratitude can help reinforce a sense of confidence. If you struggle with self-image, try shifting the focus from how your body looks to what it allows you to do — whether it's walking, creating, laughing, or embracing loved ones. **Practicing positive self-talk and treating yourself with kindness can help build lasting confidence.**



THESE STRATEGIES CAN ALSO HELP REMIND YOU OF ALL THE THINGS YOUR BODY STILL ALLOWS YOU TO EXPERIENCE — EVERY MOVEMENT, EVERY BREATH, EVERY MOMENT OF STRENGTH. CULTIVATING GRATITUDE FOR WHAT REMAINS POSSIBLE CAN GENTLY SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE FROM LOSS TO RESILIENCE.

Equally important is giving yourself permission to feel your emotions — fully and without judgment. When you nurture elevated emotional states like joy, hope, gratitude, or love, you not only support your mental well-being but also create inner conditions that help your body heal and your spirit thrive. In these moments, you are not defined by illness, but by the courage, vitality, and possibility that still live within you.



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Seeking Professional Support

Emotional healing is just as important as physical recovery. Therapy or counselling can provide coping strategies for anxiety, depression, fear of recurrence, or survivorship guilt. **Seeking professional help is a proactive step in prioritizing your well-being, not a sign of weakness.**



05

**STAYING
ENGAGED**

WITH YOUR
HEALTHCARE TEAM

**Maintaining
an active
relationship
with your health
care team is
key to ensuring
long-term well-
being.**

Even after treatment ends, follow-up care remains essential for monitoring your health, addressing any lingering side effects, and supporting your overall wellness. *Being proactive about your health care helps you feel in control of your body and your future.*

Schedule Regular Checkups

Routine follow-ups with your medical team help monitor for recurrence, assess recovery progress, and address any new or ongoing symptoms before they become major concerns.

Advocate for Yourself

You know your body best. If you experience lingering side effects, new symptoms, or emotional challenges, speak up. Ask questions, request referrals to specialists if needed, and ensure that your concerns are heard and addressed.

Stay Informed

Educate yourself about your health and wellness options. Understanding potential long-term side effects, making lifestyle adjustments, and employing preventive care strategies empower you to make confident decisions about your survivorship path.

**IF MEDICAL VISITS
OR FOLLOW-UP
APPOINTMENTS CAUSE
DISTRESS, ANXIETY, OR
PANIC, YOU ARE NOT
ALONE.**



*You are allowed
to ask for help.*

For some survivors, these reactions may be signs of medical PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) — a very real and valid response to the trauma of illness, invasive procedures, or prolonged medical stress. You might find yourself avoiding appointments, feeling overwhelmed by reminders of treatment, or experiencing intense emotional or physical symptoms before check-ups.

If this sounds familiar, know that it's not your fault, and *you're not "overreacting"*—your mind and body are responding to real past threats. Support is available. Speaking with a therapist, joining a survivorship group, or exploring grounding techniques such as breathwork or guided imagery can help you begin to feel safer and more in control.

At the same time, it's also possible to experience post-traumatic growth — a process where, through healing, you may discover new strength, deeper appreciation for life, or a clearer sense of what truly matters. These two things are not opposites: you can still feel the weight of trauma while also stepping into new resilience.

**YOU ARE ALLOWED TO
ASK FOR HELP. YOU ARE
ALLOWED TO MOVE AT
YOUR OWN PACE. AND YOU
ARE WORTHY OF SUPPORT,
HEALING, AND HOPE —
EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.**

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Affirmations

I am more than my past. I embrace my future with hope, strength, and confidence, knowing that every step forward is a victory.

My body is strong in its own way, and I honour it with patience, care, and gratitude for all that it continues to do for me.

I release fear and embrace the joy of living, knowing that I am capable of growth, healing, and new possibilities for myself. I allow myself to heal on my own terms, honoring my pathway without comparison or guilt.

I allow myself to heal on my own terms, honouring my pathway without comparison or guilt.

Each day is a gift, and even on difficult days, I find moments of joy, purpose, and meaning.

Even with challenges, I am in control of my well-being and make choices that nourish my mind, body, and soul.

I give myself permission to celebrate my pathway, my progress, and the life I continue to build.

My pathway has made me resilient, and I trust that I have the strength to face whatever comes next with courage and grace.

I am surrounded by love, support, and opportunities, and I welcome them into my life with an open heart.