

# THRIVING *and* SURVIVING



## Coronavirus and Cancer

The University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS) strives to go beyond treating the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and preventing its spread. Our goal is to help all of our patients, particularly those with conditions like cancer, navigate these difficult times.

You might be wondering how high your risk of getting sick is if you're exposed to coronavirus as a cancer patient.

All patients receiving, or recently completing, cancer treatment are considered to be immunocompromised and at a higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

Those patients actively receiving chemotherapy, or recently completing a course of chemotherapy or radiation, should be particularly careful. Similarly, those who have had a bone marrow transplant should be cautious.

Speak to your oncologist if you're unsure how long past cancer treatment you are considered immunocompromised, as it can vary significantly from patient to patient.

If you're actively receiving cancer treatment, follow these steps to protect yourself from the virus.

\* You may be considering canceling appointments, waiting to have lab work or even stopping your treatments. The best course of action is to talk to your oncologist. Many UMMS cancer programs offer telemedicine options for your convenience. Contact your doctor by phone or use MyPortfolio to send a secure message.

\* If you're concerned that coming down with coronavirus could make your cancer move to your lungs or that you're at risk of developing lung cancer, there is no evidence at this time that coronavirus changes the behavior of any cancer.

\* The concern for cancer patients is that coronavirus complications appear to be more common in cancer patients than the rest of the population.

Let's say you do have to leave your home for an essential service. Such as grocery shopping or medical visits. What then? Well, cancer patients have options.

\* First, try to have food and medications delivered. It's unlikely you'll get sick with coronavirus after accepting a delivery as long as you practice good hand hygiene.

\* If a delivery is not possible, definitely wear a mask when you go out in public. Gloves do not provide much protection, since coronavirus gets on your gloves just as easily as it gets on your hands. Also, go to the store first thing in the morning. Some stores are limiting the first hour to the elderly and patients with health concerns.

\* If you do go out, or have a spouse who goes out. It is unnecessary to make them take off their clothes before coming in the home, as long as your spouse does not work directly with coronavirus patients.

There are many factors cancer patients do have control over during this time. For example, continue with healthy habits such as eating a balanced diet and getting exercise to help boost your immune system.

If appropriate, continue to working but remotely. Everyone is advised to stay at home if their work isn't part of essential services, but check with your oncologist if you're uncertain whether continuing to work is right for you.

Remember that even though cancer patients especially must practice social distancing, you are not alone. UMMS is here to help keep cancer patients safe while they receive the care they need.

## July 2020 Survivorship Resources

**AS WE MOVE INTO ANOTHER PHASE OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT, you may be feeling less than 100%. Here's a few ideas to make you feel a little better:**

**\*Stop being so hard on yourself:**

We put a lot of pressure on ourselves. While it's beneficial to aspire to greatness, sometimes you need to sit back, reflect and recognize all the good things you have going on right now. So when you're feeling down, try this: think about the things in life you're grateful for. Focus on what you have...not what you don't. Stop putting so much pressure on yourself. Be content with who you are right now at this moment. And remember, happiness is a choice.

**\*Get up and move:**

One of the best ways to pick yourself up when you're having a tough day is to get off your butt and do some exercise. For example, go outside and take a walk. Ride your bike around the block. Go to the gym.

**\* Surround yourself with people you Love:**

Family and friends can be the best medicine when you have the blues. Even if you can't see them in person, pick up the phone and call someone you love. Sometimes all you need is a friend to listen to you and help you get some stuff off your chest.

**\*Find a way to laugh:**

We take life a little too seriously sometimes. But let's put this in perspective: how you're feeling right now is one tiny moment out of the thousands you will experience in your life. Know that sadness is temporary. And pick yourself up by watching your favorite funny show, movie or online video.

**\*Eat something healthy:**

Guess what most people eat when they feel down? That's right, junk food. Do the opposite and your body will thank you. Eat healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. Grabbing a healthy snack can help you feel better and fill your body with proper nutrients. That's a win-win.

**\*Spend time with animals:**

Pets are therapeutic, and they're smart; they can sense when you're sad. Even if you don't have a dog, cat, or other pet, you likely have a friend who does. So try spending some time around animals and watch your stress melt away.

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### Support Groups

Support group for cancer patients (CARES) still meets on the 1st & 3rd Thursday 5-7 pm by ZOOM. Want to try it? Call Sharon Loving, LCSW-C, for more info: 43-254-5940. If you don't feel comfortable "Zooming", you can talk to her 1:1.

Caregivers support group still meets the 1st Saturday each month from 9am to 10:30, but **OVER THE PHONE, BY ZOOM!** Interested? Call Patty Plaskon, PHD, LCSW-C for more info. 410-820-6800

Women supporting Women: Breast cancer support group, Cambridge, MD. For more info call Bobbie Rideout 410-228-3078

Chestertown Cancer support group, for more info, call Chrissy Nelson, 410-778-7668 X 2175

**Is Remembering even simple everyday things a little more challenging now-a-days? There is help for you:**

Cognitive (memory) impairments experienced by cancer survivors are considered another health challenge that directly affects prognosis, quality of life and longer survival. It is well known that of those people who receive chemotherapy, most will experience some associated memory impairment. These changes are described usually, as mild to moderate deficits in attention, concentration, language skills or executive function (such as multitasking and ability to organize information) following treatment with chemotherapeutic agents.

Even if you have not received chemotherapy during your cancer therapy you may still be experiencing cognitive changes. The reason for these changes is not absolutely clear but the changes are real and not necessarily permanent. Memory changes, also, can be linked with the aging process.

Your memory changes may be distressful, or annoying to you. But there is help for you, no matter the cause, if you report it and discuss it with your care team.

### ***Signs and symptoms of Cognitive Impairments***

- Difficulty in comprehension or understanding
- Inability to follow directions
- Easily distracted, trouble concentrating, focusing or paying attention
- Slower processing information
- Difficulty with spatial orientation
- Difficulty with numbers or finance
- Difficulty with names, dates and details
- Inability to multitask
- Behavior changes and socially inappropriate behavior

### ***Treatment can..***

- Capitalize on your strengths and address weaknesses
- Facilitate your activities and participation by assisting you to acquire new skills and strategies to overcome distressful memory issues.
- Modify factors that serve as barriers and help make you more successful in communication and participation in your daily life.

If you are experiencing memory issues, please discuss with your physician. For additional help you may contact: Oncology Nurse Navigator, Margot Spies 1-240-677-4700.

