

Fear of Cancer Recurrence and Scan Anxiety



OVERVIEW

'Fear of recurrence' refers to the worry or fear that the cancer will return to its original site, or that a new cancer will develop elsewhere in the body. The fear can set in immediately after treatment ends, but most commonly peaks 2-5 years after treatment finishes. For most people it is experienced intermittently, in extreme cases however it can intrude on thoughts and makes general functioning difficult. Some survivors of cancer describe this fear as a 'dark cloud' hovering over their life, dampening their ability to get excited about the future.

Many people who complete treatment for lymphoma or CLL are initially hypervigilant of new symptoms, aches, pains or areas of swelling in their body for several months, believing that these are signs the cancer has returned. While this is very normal behaviour and often fades over time, it is encouraged that you see your GP or treating team for advice if you are very worried about any new symptoms. Keep in mind that your body may look, feel and behave differently than it did prior to treatment.

The phrase 'scanxiety' is often used amongst patients in survivorship and relates to the anxiety and stress experienced before or after follow-up scans and blood tests. It is important to know that both 'scanxiety' and fear of recurrence are normal post treatment experiences and generally reduce in intensity over time.

Practical Tips to Manage Fear of Cancer Recurrence

- Discussing your fears and concerns with family members or friends who you feel comfortable sharing with
- Talking to a counsellor, psychologist or spiritual care worker
- Practising meditation and mindfulness techniques, especially in the days leading up to and immediately following scans and appointments
- Exercising regularly and making generally healthy lifestyle choices
- Continuing with current hobbies, or getting involved in new activities which challenge you and allow you to meet new people
- Attending all your follow up appointments and if possible, bringing a support person with you. It can also be helpful

to write a list of topics or concerns that you would like to discuss with your doctor.

- Participating in regular cancer screening programs for breast, cervical and bowel cancer
- Ask your medical team to have your follow up review as soon as possible after the scan so you do not wait too long for a follow up call
- Minimising use of the internet to research new symptoms or concerns
- Becoming a part of the Facebook 'Lymphoma Down Under' support group and discussing how you're feeling with others in Australia who may be feeling the same things.

It can also be helpful to know that many people report that fear of recurrence generally reduces over time as their confidence builds. If you feel that this is not the case for you, it is encouraged that you speak about this with your GP or treating team about what other options may be helpful for you.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Organisation	How can they help?
Lymphoma Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymphoma Australia offers a wide variety of resources and support for people with lymphoma or CLL and their carers. Please visit our website www.lymphoma.org.au for further information • Lymphoma Nurse Support Line: 1800 953 081 or email: nurse@lymphoma.org.au • Online private Facebook group: Lymphoma Down Under http://bit.ly/2mrPA1k
Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre (ACSC)	<p>The ACSC is a unique service based at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Victoria. It provides a comprehensive collection of resources and information for cancer survivors and their carers: http://bit.ly/2njy5kc</p>

FACT SHEET

Organisation	How can they help?
Beyond Blue	Beyond Blue provide phone, online and email support for those experiencing high levels of depression, anxiety, stress or suicidal thoughts. Call 1300 22 4636 or visit: www.beyondblue.org.au
Calm	Calm is a free smart phone app which contains over 100 guided meditations for anxiety, stress and sleep management. From beginners to advanced listeners. Visit: www.calm.com/
Cancer Council	Cancer Council offers a range of services to support people affected by cancer, their families and friends. Services may vary depending on where you live. Visit: www.cancer.org.au or call 13 11 20
CanTeen	CanTeen is an organisation working with young people affected by cancer 12-25 years. They have online support chat rooms, phone and face to face counselling as well as fun events and camps. Support for parents too. www.canteen.org.au or email support@canteen.org.au or call 1800 835 932
Headspace	Phone and face-to-face counselling for those affected by mental health issues aged between 12-24 years. Call: 1800 650 890
Leukaemia Foundation	The Leukaemia Foundation provide support groups, accommodation and transport assistance for people living with blood cancers and their carers: www.leukaemia.org.au
Lifeline	Australia-wide 24-hour telephone crisis support and counselling for those in crisis or need of support. Call 13 11 14 (24/7)
Medicare Australia	Check with your GP if you are eligible for a Mental Health Treatment Plan (MHTP). This plan can give you up to 10 sessions with a registered psychologist either significantly or completely subsidised by Medicare. For more information visit: https://bit.ly/2nb0SHU

Organisation	How can they help?
Men's Line Australia	Telephone counselling service for men specialising in relationships, domestic violence, mental health, wellbeing and discussion forums. Call: 1300 78 99 78
RedKite	RedKite provides essential support to children, young people and their family/ friends from cancer diagnosis, treatment and after treatment aged 0-25 years. www.redkite.org.au or email support@redkite.org.au or call 1800 REDKITE (1800 733 548)
WeCan	WeCan is an Australian supportive care website to help people affected by cancer find the information, resources and support services they may need following a diagnosis of cancer. Visit: https://wecan.org.au

This resource was last reviewed and updated October 2019