NATIONAL
OVARIAN CANCER
COALITION®

# LIVING WITH
# OVARIAN CANCER

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER COALITION®

Since 1991, the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition (NOCC) has supported thousands of cancer survivors, delivered millions of educational resources and connected with countless local community partners to raise awareness about ovarian cancer. The NOCC is an influential national advocate for patients, survivors, caregivers, and their families living with ovarian cancer and remains steadfast in its mission "to save lives through the prevention and cure of ovarian cancer, and to improve the quality of life for survivors and caregivers." At the NOCC, our Teal Team leads with our values and unique experiences to provide support and education across all communities, ensuring everyone is empowered to advocate for their health.

### OUR MISSION

To save lives through the prevention and cure of ovarian cancer and to improve the quality of life for survivors and their caregivers.

### OUR VISION

We envision a future where no one ever loses their life to ovarian cancer.

### OUR VALUES

Connection, inclusivity, perseverance, authenticity, compassion, empowerment.

**For more information about the NOCC, visit ovarian.org or call 1-888-OVARIAN (1-888-682-7426).**

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**Your quality of life matters—not just during treatment, but after it, too.** As you navigate this experience with ovarian cancer, you may find yourself facing concerns that go beyond the physical, like changes in appearance, shifts in how you see yourself, and the ongoing challenge of fatigue. You deserve to understand how treatment may affect your everyday life.

This booklet was created to help you feel informed, validated, and supported as you move through life with ovarian cancer. It offers guidance on the many ways cancer can impact your well-being—physically, emotionally, and socially—so you can better advocate for your needs and find comfort along the way.

We hope this resource provides you with guidance, clarity, and a reminder that you are not alone - there are people who care and are committed to being a steady source of support throughout your journey.

For more information about ovarian cancer treatment and living well after an ovarian cancer diagnosis, visit ovarian.org.

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CHAPTER 1

# UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH SIDE EFFECTS

Treatment for ovarian cancer can affect your body and mind in many ways. These side effects may feel overwhelming, but they are common and can be managed. Knowing what to expect, how to talk with your care team, and what steps you can take can help you feel more in control.

## Managing Side Effects: Communicating with Your Care Team

Good communication is essential. If you notice something that doesn't feel right, tell your doctor or nurse. Some symptoms may seem minor, but they can provide important clues about your health and well-being.

Tips for managing side effects:

- Keep a diary of your symptoms when they happen, how often, and how they affect your daily life.
- Don't wait for your doctor to ask-bring up side effects yourself.
- Ask if there are medications, therapies, or lifestyle changes that could help.
- Advocate for yourself. You deserve to feel heard and supported.

## Surgical Side Effects

Surgery is often the first step in treating ovarian cancer. It is important to recognize that some surgical side effects can significantly impact your emotional and physical quality of life. Don't be afraid to ask your health care team questions to help you cope with these side effects.

- **Pain or discomfort**- pain is a personal experience that can be different for everyone. Your health care team can determine what type of pain you are having and what treatment options are best. You should speak to your doctor to determine your personalized pain-management strategy. Many cancer centers now have pain specialists and palliative care departments to help you.

### Things that may help:

- **Treat pain early**- talk with your doctor or nurse early—don't wait until your pain is unbearable to treat it.
- **Stay on schedule**- follow your doctor's guidelines for taking medication. Don't "wait it out" until the pain gets worse.
- **Try complementary therapies**- meditation, aromatherapy, acupuncture, yoga, and other methods may help alleviate your pain.
- **Talk with your family and friends**- let them know about your pain so they can help you.
- **Call your doctor**- let them know if you are very tired or in a lot of pain.

- **Fatigue**- feeling tired is one of the most common side effects of ovarian cancer and its treatment. But this isn't regular tiredness—it's a deep, ongoing fatigue that doesn't go away with rest or sleep. It can affect your energy, mood, and ability to do everyday things.

  There isn't one clear cause of cancer-related fatigue. It can be linked to treatment, side effects like anemia or poor sleep, or even just moving your body less than usual. When your muscles and heart aren't used as much, even small tasks can feel harder.

  If you're feeling low on energy, talk to your care team. They can check for treatable issues like anemia, thyroid problems, pain, depression, or sleep concerns. Getting support for these can make a big difference.

### Things that may help:

- **Save your energy**- think about what matters most. Listen to your body and focus on the activities that matter most to you, and ask for help with the rest. Eat well and drink plenty of fluids to give your body the energy and protein it needs to heal. Aim for eight hours of sleep each night and take short naps if needed to help your body recover.
- **Find ways to manage stress**- stress can make fatigue feel even worse. Try simple relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or gentle stretching. Doing calming activities you enjoy like reading, listening to music, or spending time in nature can help you feel more grounded. Talking to a counselor, support group, or trusted friend can also ease emotional stress and help you feel less alone.
- **Gentle exercise**- movement like walking can help fight fatigue. Always check with your doctor first, especially if you have other side effects like bone pain or neuropathy. A good rule of thumb: if you're moving and can talk (but not sing), you're at a moderate and safe pace.

- **Bowel changes or obstructions**- bowel changes are a common side effect during and after ovarian cancer treatment. You may experience constipation, diarrhea, bloating, or a general change in your normal bowel habits. These changes can be caused by surgery, chemotherapy, pain medications, dietary shifts, or reduced physical activity. In some cases, scar tissue from surgery (called adhesions) or tumor involvement in the bowel can lead to a more serious condition called a bowel obstruction. This happens when part of the intestine becomes blocked, which can result in severe pain, cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and an inability to pass stool or gas. These symptoms should be reported to your health care team right away.

  In addition, sometimes, after part of the bowel is removed during surgery, doctors may need to create an opening in the belly to help waste leave the body. This is called an ostomy. It gives the bowel time to heal and can be either temporary or permanent. The type of ostomy, called a colostomy or ileostomy, depends on which part of the bowel is affected.

### Things that may help:

  - **Keep track of any bowel changes**- this can give your care team important information to help determine the best course of action for you.
  - **Drink plenty of fluids**- staying hydrated, eating a balanced diet (as recommended), and staying active can help manage mild symptoms. Non-caffeinated and warm fluids can be helpful.
  - **Rest**- if you have diarrhea, rest as much as possible. Diarrhea can make you feel very tired.

- **Menopause after surgery**- if your ovaries are removed as part of ovarian cancer treatment, you will go into surgical menopause right away. This happens because the ovaries produce important hormones like estrogen and progesterone. Without them, your body quickly enters menopause—regardless of your age.

  This sudden shift can bring on symptoms such as:

  - Hot flashes
  - Night sweats
  - Mood swings or irritability
  - Vaginal dryness
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Changes in sexual desire

  These symptoms can feel intense, especially if you're younger or weren't expecting menopause to happen so quickly. You're not alone—and there are ways to manage these changes. Hormone therapy, non-hormonal treatments, and lifestyle adjustments can help.

  You'll find more information, tips, and support in the section titled "Navigating Menopause and Sexual Health."

- **Loss of fertility**- for some, treatment for ovarian cancer can lead to the loss of fertility, which means being unable to become pregnant naturally. This can be a deeply emotional and personal part of the cancer journey, especially for those who had hoped to have children in the future. It's okay to grieve this loss—your feelings are valid. Talking with a counselor, connecting with others who understand, or exploring options like surrogacy, adoption, or egg preservation (if done before treatment) may help you begin to process and plan. You'll find more details in the "Fertility and Family Planning" section.

- **Lymphedema**- swelling that usually happens in the legs, feet, or lower belly area after cancer treatment. It can occur when lymph nodes are removed during surgery or damaged by radiation. The lymphatic system is part of your immune system and helps drain fluid from your tissues. When that flow is blocked, fluid can build up, leading to swelling, discomfort, or a heavy feeling. While not everyone with ovarian cancer will develop lymphedema, it's important to know the signs and take steps early if symptoms begin. Lymphedema can develop shortly after treatment or even months or years later.

  Signs of lymphedema:

  - Swelling in one or both legs, feet, or lower abdomen
  - A feeling of heaviness or tightness
  - Aching, tingling, or reduced flexibility
  - Clothing or shoes feel tighter than usual
  - Skin that feels firm or thick

Lymphedema can be managed, and with the right care, many people find relief. If you're unsure whether what you're experiencing is related to lymphedema, it's always okay to ask. You deserve comfort and support every step of the way.

### Things that may help:

- **Talk to your care team**- if you notice new or worsening swelling, let your doctor or nurse know.
- **Stay active**- gentle movement, like walking, stretching, or swimming, can help lymph fluid flow more freely.
- **Wear compression garments**- if recommended by your care team, special socks, stockings, or wraps can support fluid drainage and reduce swelling.
- **Elevate your legs**- raising your legs above heart level for short periods during the day can help relieve swelling.
- **Protect your skin**- keep skin clean and moisturized to prevent infection. Avoid cuts, bug bites, or burns, which can make lymphedema worse.
- **See a lymphedema specialist**- physical therapists trained in lymphedema management can teach you massage techniques (called manual lymphatic drainage) and exercises that may help.

## Chemotherapy Side Effects

Chemotherapy targets fast-growing cancer cells but also affects healthy cells. This can lead to a range of side effects. The good news is that many side effects can be treated or managed. If you are scheduled to undergo chemotherapy, be sure to ask your doctor and/or nurse about what types of side effects your chemotherapy may have.

The side effects listed in this section include only some of the most commonly occurring ones associated with chemotherapy used to treat ovarian cancer.

- **Gastrointestinal changes**- chemotherapy may interrupt your normal bowel function, resulting in changes in digestion, such as bloating, cramping, constipation, and/or diarrhea. It is important to let your health care team know, since both can result in major problems if not treated. As with any side effect, it is advised that you note when you experience it. Ask your doctor about any dietary changes or medications that may help.

### Things that may help:

- **Stay hydrated**- sip water, herbal teas, or electrolyte drinks throughout the day.
- **Do some gentle movement**- this can support your digestion.
- **Replace fluids-** since severe diarrhea can result in dehydration.

### When to seek medical help:

If you're experiencing either constipation or diarrhea, talk to your doctor. They can help you explore safe options for relief and discuss whether things like diet changes, gentle activity, or medications might be helpful.

- **Nausea**- nausea is one of the most common side effects of cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy. For some, it can be mild and occasional, while others may experience more persistent or severe symptoms. It may start right after treatment or even days later. Certain smells, foods, or eating patterns can make it worse.

  Nausea can also be a symptom of gastrointestinal (GI) issues, which are another common complication during and after ovarian cancer treatment. Constipation, bowel changes, or even partial obstructions can trigger or worsen nausea. If you're experiencing other GI symptoms, it's important to mention them to your care team, as treating the underlying issue may help relieve your nausea as well.

  The good news is that there are effective ways to manage nausea, and it's often easier to prevent it than to treat it once it starts. That's why it's important to talk to your care team about nausea before your treatment begins. Anti-nausea medications (also called antiemetics) can be given ahead of time to reduce the chance of symptoms.

Even with medication, nausea can affect your appetite or ability to eat and drink. You might not feel hungry at all, or you may feel queasy even without eating. This can make it difficult to get the nutrients your body needs to heal and stay strong.

If you're struggling with nausea, reduced appetite, or weight loss, let your care team know. They may prescribe medications, refer you to a dietitian, or suggest other strategies that can help.

### Things that may help:

- **Eat small, frequent meals**- large meals can feel overwhelming. Try snacks every 2–3 hours instead.
- **Choose bland or cold foods**- some smells trigger nausea, cold foods like yogurt, smoothies, or crackers may be easier to tolerate.
- **Stay hydrated**- sip water, herbal teas, or electrolyte drinks throughout the day.
- **Try ginger or peppermint**- ginger tea, peppermint oil, or candies may ease mild nausea.
- **Avoid lying down after eating**- staying upright can help with digestion and reduce nausea.
- If your symptoms are persistent or causing weight loss, don't wait- talk to your doctor. Nutritional support is an important part of your care.

- **Taste and appetite changes**- changes in taste and appetite are common during treatment. Foods might taste bland, bitter, or metallic. Some days you may have little to no appetite, while other days might feel more normal. These changes can be frustrating, especially when you're trying to eat well during recovery.

  Treatment, medications, and changes in saliva can all affect how food tastes. Nausea, fatigue, and emotional stress can also play a role. While these symptoms may improve over time, there are ways to make eating easier and more enjoyable.

### Things that may help:

- **Try new flavors**- use herbs, spices, lemon juice, or marinades to enhance taste.
- **Opt for cold or room-temperature foods**- these may be easier to tolerate if smells are bothering you.
- **Stay hydrated**- dry mouth can make food taste dull—sip water throughout the day.
- **Rinse before meals**- a mild saltwater or baking soda rinse can refresh your mouth.
- **Use plastic utensils**- these may help if you notice a metallic taste.
- **Eat when you can**- don't wait for mealtimes—eat more when your appetite is better.
- **Choose high-calorie snacks**- smoothies, nut butters, or avocados can boost nutrition in small amounts.
- If taste and appetite changes are making it hard to eat or maintain weight, let your health care team know. A dietitian can help you find foods that work for you and support your recovery.

- **Peripheral neuropathy**- this is a common side effect of certain chemotherapy drugs used to treat ovarian cancer. It happens when these drugs damage the nerves, usually in the hands, feet, fingers, or toes. You might feel tingling, numbness, burning, or shooting pain. Some people also describe feeling like they're wearing gloves or socks when they're not.

  These symptoms can make everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt, walking, or holding a pen more difficult. In some cases, neuropathy can affect your balance and ability to walk, or temperature sensitivity. For most people, symptoms improve over time after treatment ends, but for others, they may last longer or become permanent.

  Tell your health care team if you notice any of these changes. Early treatment or adjustments to your chemotherapy may help prevent symptoms from getting worse. If neuropathy affects your daily life, your care team may refer you to a physical or occupational therapist for more support.

### Things that may help:

- **Prepare ahead of time**- ask your doctor about cryotherapy, applying cold packs, frozen gloves, or socks during chemotherapy. This may lower the risk of developing neuropathy.
- **Protect your hands and feet**- wear gloves when cooking, gardening, or cleaning, and avoid walking barefoot.
- **Be cautious with hot or cold items**- use oven mitts and test water temperature before bathing.
- **Choose supportive shoes**- wear shoes with a good grip to help prevent falls.

- **Use tools to help with fine motor tasks**- button hooks or easy-grip utensils can reduce frustration.
- **Stay active**- gentle exercise like walking or yoga may improve circulation and help with symptoms.
- **Ask about medications**- some drugs can help manage nerve pain.

### If you are experiencing difficulty with balance or walking, suggestions to make your living arrangements safer during this time include:

- Provide adequate lighting in your house
- Leave lights on at night
- Cover steps/stairs and hard floors with non-skid materials
- Minimize clutter in hallways and stairways
- Tape down the edges of area rugs
- Put a non-skid bathtub mat inside your bathtub
- Avoid wearing shoes that make walking difficult
- Check your hands and feet daily to look for open sores/irritation

- **Memory and thinking problems**- some notice changes in memory, focus, or clear thinking during or after chemotherapy—often called “chemo brain” or “brain fog”. It might feel like you’re more forgetful, easily distracted, or have trouble finding the right word. These changes can be frustrating and may affect daily tasks, work, or conversations. While the exact cause isn’t fully understood, it may be linked to the cancer itself, treatment side effects, fatigue, stress, or other health issues. For most people, these symptoms improve over time, but recovery can be slow and vary from person to person. The good news is that the brain usually recovers over time. However, vague mental changes may go on for years.

### Things that may help:

- **Write things down**- use a notebook, planner, or phone app to keep track of important tasks, appointments, and to-do lists. This can take pressure off your memory.
- **Stay organized**- try keeping items in the same place (like keys or your phone) and setting reminders for medications or activities. Routine can make it easier to focus and remember.
- **Do one thing at a time**- multitasking can make memory issues worse. Focus on one task at a time and take breaks when you need them.
- **Exercise your brain**- activities like puzzles, reading, or memory games may help sharpen your thinking. Start small and be patient with yourself.
- **Talk to your care team**- if memory problems are affecting your daily life, let your doctor know. They can check for other causes, like medication side effects, sleep problems, or depression, and suggest next steps.
- **Be kind to yourself**- brain fog is real and not your fault. Give yourself grace and time to adjust. Let others know what you’re going through—they may be more understanding than you expect.

- **Hair loss**- the loss of hair is a common side effect of chemotherapy. It can happen gradually or all at once, and it may affect not just the hair on your head but also your eyebrows, eyelashes, and body hair. While it’s temporary for most people, the emotional impact can be very real. Losing your hair may affect how you feel about yourself and how others see you. It’s valid to feel a sense of loss; our hair is often closely connected to how we see ourselves, and can play a role in our self-confidence. Hair usually begins to grow back a few weeks after treatment ends, but the texture or color may be different at first.

### Things that may help:

- **Prepare ahead of time**- some people choose to cut their hair short or shave their head before hair loss begins, to feel more in control of the process. Others prefer to wait. Do what feels right for you.
- **Protect your scalp**- your scalp may be more sensitive during this time. Wear hats, scarves, or sunscreen to protect it from the sun and cold weather. Use gentle shampoos and avoid heat styling or harsh chemicals.
- **Consider trying scalp cooling**- scalp hypothermia means cooling the scalp with ice packs or cooling caps (cold caps) to try to prevent or reduce hair loss. If you are considering whether to use a cooling cap, it’s important to carefully weigh the potential benefits, discomforts, costs, and risks. Discuss the pros and cons of cooling caps with your cancer treatment doctor.
- **Explore head coverings**- wigs, scarves, beanies, or wraps can help you feel more comfortable and confident. Some insurance plans cover wigs, so check with your provider or ask your care team for resources.

  - **Talk about how you're feeling**- hair loss can be a difficult part of treatment. You're not alone. Talking with a support group, counselor, or trusted friend can help you work through the emotional side of this experience.
  - Remember—it's temporary- hair loss from chemo is almost always reversible. Your hair will likely grow back, though it might take a few months and look or feel a little different at first.

- **Low blood counts**- chemotherapy can slow down your bone marrow, which is where new blood cells are made. This can lead to low levels of red blood cells (called anemia), white blood cells (neutropenia), or platelets (thrombocytopenia). These changes can make you feel very tired, more likely to get infections, or bruise and bleed more easily. It's usually temporary, but your care team will check your blood regularly and help manage any problems that come up.

### Things that may help:

  - **Neutropenia (low white blood cells)**- when your immune system is weakened, you're more vulnerable to infections. Wash your hands often, avoid crowds or anyone who is sick, and follow any food safety tips from your care team. Let them know right away if you get a fever.
  - **Anemia (low red blood cells)**- if your red blood cell count is low, you might feel tired, weak, or short of breath. Rest when you need to and don't overdo it. Avoid activities and contact sports that can result in potential injury. Your care team may recommend medicine, iron supplements, or sometimes a blood transfusion.
  - **Thrombocytopenia (low platelets)**- can make you bruise or bleed more easily. Avoid bumps, cuts, or falls. Use a soft toothbrush, be careful when shaving, and check with your doctor before taking any medicines that could increase bleeding, like aspirin.
  - **Eat well and stay hydrated**- a healthy, balanced diet supports your body's ability to recover. Drinking plenty of fluids and eating foods rich in nutrients and protein can help your body rebuild blood cells. A dietitian can offer guidance tailored to your needs.
  - **Know when to call**- let your care team know right away if you have a fever, chills, unusual bruising or bleeding, extreme fatigue, or signs of infection. These symptoms could be serious and need quick attention.

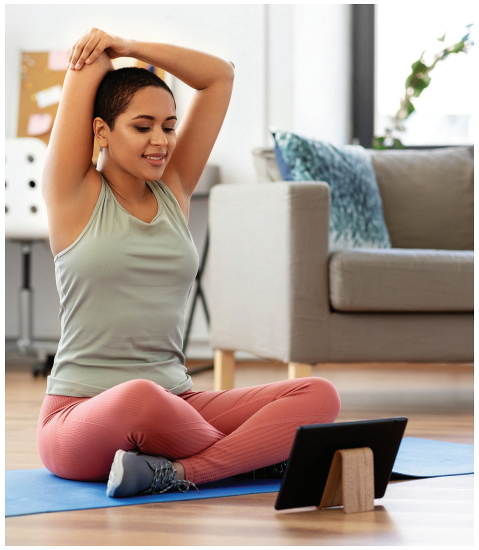
- **Fatigue**- fatigue is one of the most common and frustrating side effects of ovarian cancer and its treatment. But this isn't regular tiredness—it's called cancer-related fatigue, and it's a deep, ongoing exhaustion that doesn't go away with rest or sleep. It can affect your energy, mood, concentration, and ability to do everyday tasks. The cause isn't always clear, but it may be related to treatment, anemia, poor sleep, pain, emotional stress, or simply moving your body less than usual. Even small tasks can feel harder when your muscles and heart aren't being used as much.

### Things that may help:

  - **Save your energy**- this is called energy conservation. Focus on what matters most and ask for help with other tasks. Don't feel guilty about saying no or taking breaks.
  - **Eat well and stay hydrated**- your body needs fuel to heal. Good nutrition, including plenty of protein and fluids, can help you feel stronger.
  - **Get enough sleep**- aim for eight hours of sleep at night and take short naps if needed. Talk to your care team if you have trouble sleeping—they can help.
  - **Find ways to manage stress**- stress can make fatigue worse. Try deep breathing, meditation, journaling, or doing something calming like listening to music or spending time outside. Talking to a support group or counselor can also help.
  - **Move your body gently**- it might feel hard at first, but light activity, like walking or stretching, can boost energy over time. Check with your doctor first, especially if you're dealing with other side effects. A good guide: if you can walk and talk (but not sing), you're at a moderate and safe pace.
  - **Talk to your care team**- let them know if your fatigue is severe or getting worse. They can check for treatable causes like anemia, thyroid issues, pain, or depression, and suggest ways to help.

### Starting an exercise program can be tough, especially if you're dealing with fatigue. These tips can help:

- Talk to your doctor before starting a program to make sure it's safe. They may refer you to a physical therapist to help create a plan.
- Start slow- 2–3 minutes every other day is a great place to begin. You can break exercise into short sessions throughout the day.
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes, and stay hydrated.
- Set realistic short- and long-term goals, and reward yourself when you meet them, like enjoying a bath or a favorite movie.
- Find a workout buddy for encouragement and accountability.



- **Skin changes**- chemotherapy and targeted therapies can cause changes to your skin. You might notice dryness, itching, peeling, rash, redness, or increased sensitivity, especially on your hands, feet, or face. In some cases, your skin may become more prone to bruising or feel sunburned more easily than usual. These changes can be uncomfortable and affect how you feel about your appearance, but there are ways to manage them and protect your skin during treatment.

### Things that may help:

- **Use mild, fragrance-free soaps** and moisturizers to avoid irritation.
- **Apply lotion often**, especially after bathing, while your skin is still slightly damp.
- **Avoid long, hot showers or baths**, which can dry out your skin even more.
- **Wear sunscreen daily** and protective clothing to guard against sunburn.
- **Let your care team know** if you develop a rash, blisters, or signs of infection (like swelling or pus), especially if it's painful or spreading.

- **Mouth and throat problems**- treatments can cause side effects in your mouth and throat, such as dryness, pain, sores, sensitivity, or changes in taste. These issues can make eating and drinking uncomfortable, which can affect your nutrition and overall well-being. Mouth sores (also called mucositis) can show up a few days after chemotherapy begins and may take time to heal. Throat irritation can make it harder to swallow or speak.

### Things that may help:

- **Brush your teeth gently** with a soft-bristle toothbrush and use mild, alcohol-free mouth rinses.
- **Stay hydrated** by sipping water throughout the day.
- **Avoid spicy, salty, acidic, or crunchy foods** that can irritate your mouth.
- **Try soft, bland foods** like yogurt, mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, or smoothies.
- **Suck on ice chips** or sugar-free popsicles to soothe your mouth.
- **Ask for over-the-counter mouthwashes** that can help relieve pain and promote healing.
- **Let your care team know** if you have persistent pain, bleeding, or signs of infection in your mouth or throat.

- **Sleep problems**- it's common to have trouble sleeping during or after cancer treatment. You might find it hard to fall asleep, stay asleep, or feel rested even after a full night in bed. Stress, anxiety, physical discomfort, and medication side effects can all contribute to sleep issues. Poor sleep can affect your mood, energy, and ability to cope with treatment, so it's important to take it seriously and talk to your care team if it becomes ongoing.

### Things that may help:

- **Have a bedtime routine**- try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends. A consistent schedule helps your body recognize when it's time to wind down.
- **Create a calming wind-down ritual**- gentle activities like a warm bath, deep breathing, or listening to relaxing music before bed can signal your body that it's time for sleep.

  - **Limit screen time before bed**- the blue light from phones, tablets, and TVs can interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Try to avoid screens for at least an hour before bedtime.
  - **Avoid stimulants late in the day**- caffeine, alcohol, and heavy meals in the evening can disrupt your sleep. Choose lighter dinners and switch to decaf in the afternoon.
  - **Make your sleep space comfortable**- keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet. Soft bedding, blackout curtains, or a white noise machine may also help you sleep more soundly.
  - **Talk to your care team**- if you continue having trouble sleeping, let your doctor know. They may recommend counseling, relaxation techniques, or medications that can help.
- **Treatment-induced menopause**- some ovarian cancer treatments, especially surgery to remove the ovaries or certain types of chemotherapy, can cause sudden menopause, also called treatment-induced menopause. This means your body stops producing estrogen, leading to symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, mood swings, and trouble sleeping. These changes can be intense and may feel overwhelming, especially if menopause comes on suddenly and earlier than expected. You'll find more detail in the "Navigating Menopause and Sexual Health" section.

## Palliative Care

Palliative care is specialized medical care that focuses on improving quality of life for people living with serious illnesses like ovarian cancer. It is not the same as end-of-life or hospice care—palliative care can be provided at any time after diagnosis and can be given alongside treatments like chemotherapy or surgery.

The goal of palliative care is to help you feel your best—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—by easing the symptoms and stress that come with cancer and its treatment. This may include support for pain, fatigue, sleep problems, appetite changes, nerve or muscle issues, and more.

Palliative care may involve a range of services, such as:

- Medications to ease symptoms
- Nutritional guidance
- Physical therapy and rehabilitation
- Counseling or emotional support

It's important to know that palliative care doesn't treat the cancer itself—it treats the effects cancer may have on your body and your life. It can be helpful at any age and any stage of the disease, whether you're newly diagnosed or in ongoing treatment. You can choose to start or stop palliative care at any time, depending on your needs and goals.

If you're experiencing side effects or feeling overwhelmed, talk to your care team about whether palliative care might be right for you.

### How palliative care can help:

- **Manages physical symptoms**- a palliative care team can help control side effects like pain, fatigue, nausea, sleep problems, hot flashes, neuropathy, bowel changes, and more. They work with your oncology team to find the right medications, therapies, or lifestyle strategies to ease discomfort.
- **Supports emotional well-being**- palliative care often includes counseling and mental health support to help you cope with anxiety, depression, fear, or grief that may come with a cancer diagnosis and treatment.
- **Improves communication and planning**- specialists can help you talk through your goals, make care decisions, and ensure that your treatment aligns with your values and what matters most to you.
- **Coordinates care**- your team works closely with your doctors, nurses, social workers, and other support staff to make sure all aspects of your care are connected and focused on your needs.
- **Enhances quality of life**- whether you are newly diagnosed, in treatment, or living with recurrent disease, palliative care is about helping you live fully and comfortably.
- If you are struggling with ongoing side effects or emotional distress, talk to your care team about whether a palliative care referral might be right for you. You deserve support that goes beyond treating the cancer—you deserve care for the whole you.

# Complementary Therapies and Integrative Approaches

It's natural to want to fight ovarian cancer any way you can. In recent years, increasing numbers of Americans, including those with ovarian cancer, have been turning to complementary and integrative therapies in pursuit of health and well-being. Complementary and integrative therapies are a group of diverse practices and products that are used in conjunction with standard conventional medicine.

There are countless complementary therapies, and many diagnosed with ovarian cancer have benefited from them. You might want to speak with others with cancer or your health care team to see which therapies they found most helpful or what might work best for you and your lifestyle. Also, talk with your health care team before you try any of them to make sure they won't interfere with your cancer treatment.

## Differences between complementary and alternative medicine:

There is sometimes confusion about the differences between "complementary" and"alternative" medicine, often referred to by the acronym CAM. Many medical experts prefer the more contemporary term "integrative therapy." Complementary methods are different from alternative treatments. Complementary methods are meant to be used with standard treatments. Alternative methods are used instead of standard treatments. Deciding to do alternative therapies over conventional cancer treatments could put you at risk, such as delaying or interrupting standard treatments.

## Complementary and integrative therapies:

**Acupuncture:** An ancient Chinese method of healing in which very fine, sterilized needles are inserted through the skin at specific points on the body to remove blockages in your body's flow of energy. Acupuncture helps with nausea, pain, and other side effects of cancer treatment.

**Aromatherapy:** The use of essential oils from flowers, herbs, and trees to promote health and well-being. It is often used to relieve nausea, fatigue, and stress.

**Biofeedback:** The use of simple monitoring devices to teach you how to consciously regulate your breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure to reduce stress and relieve pain and muscle tension.

**Herbal medicine:** Remedies using plant parts to treat symptoms and illnesses. Herbal medicine products are dietary supplements that many people take to improve their health. Make sure you consult with your health care professional before using herbal medicine.

**Massage:** Manipulating the body's muscle and connective tissue through rubbing, kneading, and patting to promote relaxation and well-being.

**Meditation:** Focusing your attention to suspend the stream of thoughts that usually occupy your mind. The practice is proven to result in reduction of stress and greater relaxation of mind and body.

**Prayer:** Among all forms of complementary medicine, prayer is the single most widely used practice to improve health and well-being.

**Qi Gong (chee-GUNG):** A type of Chinese medicine that combines movement, meditation, and breathing to enhance the flow of qi (an ancient term given to what is believed to be vital energy) in the body, improve blood circulation, and enhance immune function.

**Reiki (ray-kee):** A form of Japanese energy medicine in which a practitioner places their hands on or near the person receiving treatment, with the intent to transmit universal life energy and promote balance throughout the body.

**Tai Chi (tie-chee):** A mind-body practice that originated in China. A person doing tai chi moves their body slowly and gently while breathing deeply and meditating (tai chi is sometimes called "moving meditation").

**Yoga:** A form of non-aerobic exercise that involves stretching and strengthening poses, breathing exercises, and meditation to calm the nervous system and heal body, mind, and spirit.

## Side Effect Management and Support Resources:

**American Cancer Society**
**800-227-2345**
**cancer.org**
Offers information about complementary and integrative therapies to help you cope and manage treatment better.

**A Time to Heal Cancer Foundation**
**402-401-6083**
**atth.org**
Offers free courses such as Survivorship 101 and Navigating Brain Fog.

**ChemoCare**
**844-268-3901**
**chemocare.com**
Offers resources on chemotherapy and side effect information, cancer wellness information, and links to additional reliable resources and organizations.

**Foundation for Peripheral Neuropathy**
**847-883-9942**
**foundationforpn.org**
Provides patient resources, funds research to accelerate cures, and raises awareness about peripheral neuropathy.

**Get Palliative Care**
**getpalliativecare.org**
Offers a variety of palliative care resources, including a provider directory, self-assessment, patient stories, and downloadable guides.

**Ina®**
**adnocc.savorhealth.com/portal**
The Intelligent Nutrition Assistant-personalized 24/7 nutrition guidance by simply texting your questions for instant tips, recipes, and support—no calls or appointments needed.

**Look Good Feel Better**
**lookgoodfeelbetter.org**
Led by beauty professionals, the workshops help you learn to look and feel your best while undergoing treatment.

**National Cancer Institute Complementary and Alternative Therapies**
**800-4-CANCER (800-422-6237)**
**cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam**
Provides information about options in complementary and alternative therapies.

**Sharsheret- Best Face Forward 2.0**
**866-474-2744**
**sharsheret.org**
Provides financial assistance for wigs, cold caps, and select tattooing services based on eligibility and quarterly availability.

**Unite for Her**
**610-883-1177**
**uniteforher.org**
Offers the Empowered Living Program, which provides education about the benefits of integrative therapies and how they can support you. It also includes access to a dietitian and fitness classes, among others.

## CHAPTER 2

# NAVIGATING MENOPAUSE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Menopause after ovarian cancer can happen suddenly due to surgery or treatment. This section explains what to expect, how it may affect your body and emotions, and what you can do to care for yourself.

## Navigating Menopause Symptoms

For most diagnosed with ovarian cancer, menopause is a reality after treatment. Many may have already gone through natural menopause by the time they are diagnosed. Others may be put into sudden menopause due to the removal of both ovaries during surgery, or from damage caused by radiation or high-dose chemotherapy.

Sometimes, if the cancer is caught early or is a less aggressive type, younger patients may be able to keep one of their ovaries. If chemotherapy is needed, it may involve a less aggressive regimen that allows the remaining ovary to continue functioning, and menstrual cycles may return within several months. In these cases, menopause may be delayed or avoided altogether.

For those who experience early or sudden menopause as a result of treatment, you may experience both physical and emotional changes.

### Common symptoms of menopause:

- Hot flashes and facial flushing
- Night sweats
- Vaginal dryness and discomfort
- Emotional and/or mood changes
- Trouble sleeping
- Brain fog
- Bone loss (osteoporosis)
- Heart disease

Estrogen loss also affects the vaginal tissues. Without this hormone, the walls of the vagina can become thinner, drier, and less elastic, making intimacy more uncomfortable. Estrogen normally supports healthy blood flow and natural lubrication during sexual arousal, which may be diminished after menopause.

Longer term, the absence of estrogen increases the risk for conditions like osteoporosis (bone loss) and heart disease. Understandably, many express concern about hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after an ovarian cancer diagnosis. Decisions around HRT should be made with your health care provider, based on your specific cancer type and personal health history.

### The emotional side of menopause

*"It's not just physical—it can change how you see yourself and how you connect with others. You're not alone."* Mary

Beyond physical symptoms, the effects of treatment-induced menopause often ripple into one's sense of identity, body image, and relationships. The sudden hormonal changes, combined with the emotional toll of cancer, can affect desire and comfort with intimacy. These experiences are deeply personal and completely valid.

## Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are a common symptom and often improve within the first year or two, but can disrupt sleep and contribute to daytime fatigue and irritability. Hot flashes can come on unexpectedly and range from mild warmth to intense heat, often accompanied by sweating, flushing, and a rapid heartbeat. Fortunately, there are several ways to manage them.

### Things that may help:

- **Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)-** an option for some, but it's not right for everyone, especially those with hormone-sensitive cancers. Always consult your oncology team first.
- **Ask your doctor about non-hormonal medications**- non-hormonal options such as certain antidepressants can be effective for those who can't use hormones. Other medicines like gabapentin have been shown to ease hot flashes as well.
- **Try to minimize stress**- try using techniques such as deep breathing, yoga, or meditation. Practicing slow, deep breathing—about 6 to 8 breaths per minute can help reduce the frequency and intensity of hot flashes.
- **Keep your environment cool**- use fans, keep cold water nearby, and layer bedding to stay comfortable at night.
- **Wear breathable cotton clothing**- dress in layers that you can easily remove.
- **Stick to a sleep schedule**- a regular sleep schedule can improve rest.
- **Avoid triggers**- like spicy food, caffeine, and alcohol.
- **Stay hydrated**- drinking plenty of water can help ease hot flashes and keep your body feeling balanced.
- **Exercise regularly**- gentle physical activity like walking, stretching, or yoga can reduce some menopause symptoms and improve mood and sleep.
- **Give yourself grace**- these changes can affect your body image, emotions, and relationships. Be patient with yourself and seek support from your care team, counselor, or others who understand what you're going through.

## Vaginal Dryness

Vaginal dryness is a common side effect of menopause and cancer treatment and can lead to itching, irritation, or pain during intimacy. These symptoms can be frustrating and may lead to avoiding sex altogether. But there are safe, effective ways to address them. You deserve comfort and pleasure.

### Local estrogen options

Low-dose vaginal estrogen (cream, tablet or ring) can safely relieve dryness with minimal absorption into the bloodstream. These options do not treat hot flashes but can significantly improve vaginal comfort. Talk with your health care provider to see if they are right for you, especially if you have a history of hormone-sensitive cancers.

### Lubricants and moisturizers

If you prefer to avoid hormones or have mild symptoms, over-the-counter lubricants and moisturizers may be enough. Lubricants and moisturizers are available without a prescription and can be purchased at drug or grocery stores. They work by replenishing your vaginal tissue and making it wet, which can help with pain during sex.

- Water-based lubricants (like Astroglide®, KY® Liquid, Bonafide®, or Sylk™) work best. Avoid petroleum-based or scented products, which can irritate.
- Keep lubricant nearby during intimacy and apply it to both the vaginal area and your partner to reduce friction and discomfort.

- Replens® is a vaginal moisturizer used several times a week to help maintain natural moisture. It can improve vaginal health over time and may reduce the risk of yeast infections. Some experience increased discharge at first, but this usually improves.
- Gentle stretching or pelvic floor therapy may also help reduce discomfort and improve blood flow to the area.

## Tight Vaginal Muscles

Vaginal pain during sex is common after cancer, especially if you've gone through menopause. Sometimes, the muscles around the vagina tighten involuntarily out of fear or anticipation of pain. This is called vaginismus, and it can make penetration very uncomfortable or even impossible.

### Things that may help:

- Practice **pelvic floor relaxation techniques**, like deep belly breathing and gentle stretching.
- Try **progressive muscle relaxation** by gently tensing and relaxing different parts of your body, including your pelvic area.
- Use **dilators** to gradually retrain the vaginal muscles to relax and accept penetration comfortably (your care team or pelvic floor therapist can guide you).
- Consider seeing a **pelvic health physical therapist** trained in helping cancer survivors.

## Menopause and Sexual Health Resources:

**American Cancer Society**
**800-ACS-2345 (800-227-2345)**
**cancer.org**

Explains how treatment may affect sexual function and offers coping strategies.

**American Physical Therapy Association**
**800-999-2782**
**apta.org/patient-care**

Provides resources and physical therapy for pelvic floor disorders, which can affect sexual function.

**CancerCare**
**800-813-4673**
**cancercare.org**

Offers free counseling, support groups, and online workshops, including topics like sexual health and emotional intimacy.

**Woman Lab**
**womanlab.org**

Offers information about sex and health, to help preserve and recover sexual function—even after cancer or other common health conditions. By combining the power of knowledge with the strength of women, they work to ensure that every woman has the information needed to reclaim sexual well-being.

**The Scientific Network on Female Sexual Health and Cancer**
**952-683-9044**
**cancersexnetwork.org**

A network of professionals and researchers offering patient-friendly information on female sexual health after cancer.

# FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING

For many diagnosed with ovarian cancer at a younger age, questions about fertility and the possibility of having children in the future can feel overwhelming. Cancer treatment often impacts reproductive organs and hormone levels, sometimes making it harder—or even impossible—to conceive or carry a pregnancy. But while the path to parenthood may look different after cancer, there are still options.

This section explains the possibilities for preserving fertility before treatment, alternative paths to becoming a parent, and the emotional impact of infertility. No matter where you are in your journey, you deserve support, guidance, and hope.

## Fertility Preservation Options

Those who are younger with early-stage ovarian cancers, like germ cell tumors, borderline tumors, or low-grade epithelial tumors, may be able to keep one ovary and their uterus. It is still possible to get pregnant, especially if chemotherapy is less aggressive. However, chemo can damage the ovaries, possibly leading to early menopause. If having children is important, it may be best not to delay too long.

Fertility preservation techniques, such as egg or embryo freezing, may be considered to preserve future fertility options before cancer treatment begins. An experimental option involves freezing ovarian tissue before treatment, but for those with ovarian cancer, there's concern that cancer cells might remain in the tissue and grow if re-implanted.

In many cases, ovarian cancer treatment involves removing both the ovaries and the uterus, making it impossible to carry a pregnancy. Still, there are meaningful ways to grow a family:

- **Adoption**- adoption is a fulfilling path to parenthood, though it may require a letter from your doctor confirming your overall health. International agencies may sometimes be more flexible than domestic ones. Keep in mind that adoption can be a lengthy and expensive process.

- **Embryo Donation and Surrogacy**- some couples pursue parenthood by using donated embryos or combining donor eggs with their partner's sperm. A gestational carrier (surrogate) then carries the pregnancy. This option can be expensive unless a friend or family member can help as a surrogate.

## Starting the Conversation:

**If possible, talk with your health care team about your fertility goals *before* treatment starts.**

**These conversations don't always happen on their own, so if your doctor doesn't bring it up, it's okay (and important) to speak up and ask. Your future family planning deserves a place in the conversation.**

These conversations can help you—and your partner, if you have one—understand all available options and make informed decisions early on. However, in some cases, treatment must begin quickly, and there may not be time for an in-depth fertility discussion beforehand. If this happens, know that you can still ask questions and explore options as your treatment plan evolves.

Here are some questions you might ask:

- Will my treatment affect my ability to have children?
- Can I do anything to protect my fertility before treatment starts?
- Are there treatments that might let me keep my fertility?
- How long should I wait after treatment before trying to get pregnant?

## Coping with the Grief of Infertility

For some, infertility is one of the most painful parts of the cancer journey. The longing for a child may deepen after a diagnosis. This grief can be strong, whether you've never had children or already have some but hoped for more. Common emotional reactions include:

- Feeling overwhelmed when you see babies or pregnant women
- Avoiding family events or holidays where children are the focus
- Anger or sadness when hearing about unwanted pregnancies
- Feeling misunderstood when others focus only on your survival

You are not alone. Here are some tips on how to cope with the loss of fertility:

- **Allow yourself to grieve**- infertility is a real loss, and it's normal to feel sad, angry, confused, or even numb. Your emotions are valid.
- **Talk with others who understand**- connecting with others who've faced infertility can help you feel less alone.

- **Join a support group**- in-person or online groups can offer comfort and shared understanding. Check out communities like resolve.org, stupidcancer.org, and youngsurvival.org.
- **Be honest about your feelings**- it's okay to tell friends and family if certain topics or situations are hard for you, like baby showers or family gatherings.
- **Take breaks from social situations**- give yourself permission to avoid events that cause distress or trigger grief.
- **Seek professional support**- a counselor who understands both cancer and infertility can be a huge help in processing complex emotions.
- **Be gentle with yourself**- healing from this kind of loss takes time. There is no "right" way to feel, and no timeline you have to follow.

## Fertility Resources:

**ChickMission**
**512-222-6612r**
**thechickmission.org**

Ensures every young woman newly diagnosed with cancer has the option to preserve fertility through direct financial support, educational programs, and advocacy efforts.

**Coping with Fertility Concerns**
**800-813-HOPE (4673)**
**cancercare.org**

Information on coping with the loss of fertility.

**Livestrong Fertility**
**877-236-8820**
**livestrong.org**

Provides discounted and free services for those whose cancer may affect their ability to start a family in the future.

**Stupid Cancer**
**212-619-1040**
**stupidcancer.org**

Supports the adolescent young adult community by addressing the real-life hurdles that come with cancer as a young person and advocates for change where traditional support systems fall short.

**Teal Hearts Network™ - Young Adult Peer Support Group**
**888-682-7426**
**ovarian.org**

This group supports those diagnosed between 18-39, addressing unique challenges like career, finances, dating, fertility, and relationships. Share your experiences and gain emotional comfort and insight..

**The National Infertility Association**
**703-556-7172**
**resolve.org**

Provides free support and fights for the rights of people struggling to build their families.

**Worth the Wait**
**worththewaitcharity.com**

Provides financial support and educational resources for fertility treatments, adoption, and surrogacy while advocating for oncofertility within the health care system and beyond.

# CHAPTER 4
# MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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### If these thoughts sound familiar to you, you are not alone.

*"Some days, I feel like I'm just going through the motions. I laugh, I talk—but inside, I'm carrying this constant weight."* Janet

*"Even when I get good news from my doctor, the fear never fully leaves. It's like I'm always waiting for the other shoe to drop."* Tina

*"I used to be the one cheering everyone else up. Now, I wake up with a tightness in my chest and don't always know how to shake it."* Stephanie

*"I want to be strong for my family, but sometimes I cry in the shower so no one will see."* Carla

*"There are moments I feel like I've lost parts of myself—my energy, my confidence, my sense of who I was before cancer."* Leticia

*"I feel guilty for not feeling grateful. People say I'm lucky to be alive, but they don't see the sadness and fear I carry every day."* Mary

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Living with ovarian cancer means navigating not only the physical challenges of treatment but also the emotional challenges. Cancer can bring a wide range of emotions—anxiety, sadness, anger, or fear—that may come and go or linger throughout your journey. These feelings are a natural part of coping, whether you're newly diagnosed, in treatment, or adjusting to life after. Emotional well-being is just as important as physical health and deserves attention and support.

You don't have to face these challenges alone. Counseling, support groups, mindfulness, and other tools can help you feel more grounded and connected. Taking care of your mental health is a vital part of healing and a meaningful step toward finding peace and strength in the midst of uncertainty.

# Coping with Depression, Anxiety, and Fear of Recurrence

Living with ovarian cancer is not only a physical journey—it's an emotional one. It's common to experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, or fear throughout your diagnosis, treatment, and beyond. For many, these emotions become especially intense during moments of uncertainty, such as follow-up scans or the possibility of recurrence. These feelings are a normal response to a life-altering experience, but if they begin to affect your daily life, it's time to reach out for support.

**Depression** is more than feeling down—it's a deep, persistent sadness that lasts for two weeks or more and makes it difficult to enjoy life. Many describe it as one of the darkest times of their life. You may find yourself crying often, struggling to sleep (or sleeping too much), losing interest in things you once enjoyed, or withdrawing from friends and family. Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or thoughts of self-harm are signs you should speak with a health care provider immediately.

Depression can stem from many sources, including the emotional impact of a recurrence, chemical changes in the brain, certain medications, or the physical exhaustion that comes with treatment. While some sadness is expected, ongoing symptoms should not be ignored. Help is available—talk to your doctor about counseling, medication, or both. Family and friends can also play an important role. They can offer companionship, assist with daily tasks, or simply be present during difficult moments. Even small gestures can make a big difference.

**Anxiety** is another common response to living with cancer. You may feel tense, restless, or have trouble sleeping. Your heart might race, your stomach may feel knotted, or you may break into a sweat without warning. These physical symptoms are often tied to underlying fear, especially the fear of cancer returning. For some, anxiety becomes so intense that it interferes with daily life.

Recognizing anxiety gives you the chance to manage it in healthy ways. Deep breathing, guided relaxation, gentle exercise, and talking through your fears with a trusted person can help calm the nervous system. If anxiety becomes overwhelming, professional support can help you regain balance.

No matter where you are in your journey, your emotional health matters. These feelings are real, and you are not alone. Support groups, therapists, and survivorship programs are here to walk alongside you. Reaching out is not a sign of weakness—it's a courageous and healing step toward peace of mind.

### Ways to cope and practice self-care:

Every person uses different approaches when they are depressed, anxious, or sad. The following are tips other people have found helpful:

- Ask your doctor for a referral for an appropriate counselor, psychologist, social worker, or spiritual advisor.
- Express your feelings through complementary therapies such as journal writing or creative expression.
- Try to identify what triggers your anxiety.
- Try to get enough sleep at night; avoid napping during the day.
- Get outside and walk in natural settings, such as gardens or parks.
- Try meditation or massage.
- Talk with others about your anxiety. Consider attending a support group.
- Use relaxation techniques, such as controlled breathing or guided imagery.

## When More Help Is Needed

Some with ovarian cancer experience emotional distress that can be serious enough to need professional treatment, especially if they've had depression or anxiety in the past, or if physical symptoms are severe. If you're feeling persistently sad, anxious, hopeless, crying often, or are no longer enjoying things you used to love, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Therapy can be helpful—talking with a counselor or therapist can offer new perspectives and support. Proven treatments like counseling, medication, or a combination of both can ease distress and improve quality of life. If medication is prescribed, give it time to work (often several weeks), and don't hesitate to talk to your doctor if side effects occur or it doesn't seem to help. Finding the right treatment may take time, but help is available—and effective.

## Helpful Mental Health Resources

**American Psychosocial Oncology Society (APOS)**
**615-432-0090**
**www.apos-society.org**
Matches patients with trained counselors.

**CancerCare**
**800-813-4673**
**cancercare.org**
Offers free online and telephone support groups for anyone affected by cancer.

**Cancer Support Community**
**888-793-9355**
**cancersupportcommunity.org**
Offers a variety of free online support groups for people with cancer and their loved ones.

**Cancer Wellness Center**
**847-509-9595**
**cancerwellness.org**
Offers free counseling services, support groups, and health and nutrition programs.

**SHARE Cancer Support**
**844-ASK-SHARE (844-275-7427)**
**sharecancersupport.org**
Offers a variety of programs, including support groups.

**Teal Cares Network - NOCC Caregiver Peer-to-Peer Support Group**
**1.888.OVARIAN**
**ovarian.org**
Provides an online peer-to-peer support group for caregivers to connect and share their unique experiences around caring for a loved one with ovarian cancer.

**Teal Hearts Network - NOCC Survivor Peer-to-Peer Support Group**
**1.888.OVARIAN**
**ovarian.org**

Provides an online peer-to-peer suppot group where anyone impacted by ovarian cancer - at any stage of their journey - can connect, share experiences and find strength through community.

# CHAPTER 5
# PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Facing the practical and financial side of cancer can be just as overwhelming as the treatment journey, but help is available. Whether you're navigating job changes, budgeting for treatment, or simply trying to keep up with daily responsibilities, there are resources designed to support you.

## Managing Everyday Responsibilities

Ovarian cancer doesn't press pause on everyday life. The key is finding ways to prioritize what matters most, accept help when it's offered, and explore tools that can lighten the load. Start by identifying your top daily or weekly responsibilities and consider what you must do versus what you can delegate. Maybe a family member can help with errands, a neighbor can pick up groceries, or a friend can walk the dog. If you're working, talk with your employer about flexible hours, remote options, or temporary leave. Many workplaces are more accommodating than you might expect, especially with a clear, honest conversation.

Consider the practical support tools as listed below. Local nonprofits or cancer centers often offer transportation help or volunteer assistance for day-to-day tasks. Don't hesitate to ask your cancer support team if they can connect you to resources- you may not realize what's available until you ask. It's also okay to let go of some expectations.

### Things that may help with everyday tasks:

- **Ask for help**- friends and family often want to help, but don't know how. Use tools like CaringBridge or Lotsa Helping Hands to organize support for meals, rides, errands, and other tasks like housekeeping.
- **Apply for meal assistance**- look into programs like NOCC's meal delivery program, Meals on Wheels, or other local nonprofits that provide grocery delivery or meal prep services.
- **Look for child or pet care**- some community organizations, faith-based organizations, or cancer centers may offer help.

- **Get help with cleaning the house**- resources such as Cleaning for a Reason provide free house cleaning to those undergoing cancer treatment.
- **Home safety modifications**- if fatigue or mobility is a challenge, consider simple home adjustments like grab bars, shower chairs, or non-slip mats. Ask a social worker or occupational therapist for suggestions.
- **Errand and delivery services**- many grocery stores, pharmacies, and retail shops offer delivery or curbside pickup. This can help conserve your energy and reduce exposure to illness.

## Insurance and Financial Assistance

Dealing with insurance and medical bills can feel like a whole new challenge, and it's completely normal to feel overwhelmed, but you don't have to figure it out on your own. Whether you have coverage through work, Medicare, Medicaid, or a private plan, understanding what your insurance pays for can help you feel more in control and avoid unexpected costs.

The good news is there are people who can help. Most hospitals and cancer centers have financial counselors or social workers who are used to helping patients with these challenges. They can explain your insurance, help you fill out forms, work through denied claims, or direct you to programs if you don't have enough coverage.

If it feels like too much, that's okay. Asking for help early on can make things a lot easier down the road, and there are people who truly want to support you. Cancer treatment is expensive, but there is support out there. Whether you need help with prescriptions, insurance paperwork, or daily expenses, you're not alone. Don't be afraid to ask for help—the earlier, the better. Check out the resources at the end of this section.

### Things that may help:

- **Call your insurance company**- ask to speak to a case manager or patient advocate. They can explain what's covered and help you stay organized.
- **Keep organized records**- use a folder or notebook to track your Explanation of Benefits (EOBs), medical bills, and any conversations with your insurance provider or care team.
- **Ask your cancer center about financial counseling**- a financial counselor can help you apply for aid, understand costs, or set up a payment plan.
- **Apply for copay or medication assistance**- organizations like the PAN Foundation, CancerCare, and Patient Advocate Foundation help eligible patients with out-of-pocket costs.
- **Talk with your care team**- let them know if you're struggling with costs—some treatments may have equally effective lower-cost alternatives, or your doctor may be able to help appeal a denied claim.
- **Use nonprofit resources**- many organizations offer grants, transportation help, and financial coaching tailored to people with cancer.

## Work, Disability, and Legal Rights

Cancer can affect your ability to work, but you still have rights and options. If you need time off, flexible hours, or help with job protection, some laws may help, like the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or workplace disability protections.

You might also qualify for short- or long-term disability through your employer, or Social Security if treatment keeps you from working. It's okay to ask about these benefits—many people do.

If you're unsure where to start, talk to a licensed social worker. They can help you understand what you're entitled to and assist you in applying for various programs and resources. You don't have to figure it out alone. **Refer to the the resources at the end of this section.**

## Survivorship Care Plan

A Survivorship Care Plan is a written summary of your cancer treatment and a guide for your follow-up care. It's designed to help you stay informed, organized, and supported as you move beyond active treatment. The plan typically includes a record of your diagnosis and treatments, a schedule for future checkups or scans, possible long-term side effects, and recommendations for staying healthy, like managing fatigue, maintaining a balanced diet, or addressing emotional wellness.

This plan can be a valuable tool for you and your health care team. It helps ensure that everyone, including your primary care doctor, understands your history and what to watch for moving forward. Having everything in one place can also help reduce uncertainty and give you more confidence in managing your health.

How to request a Survivorship Care Plan:

- Ask your oncologist, nurse navigator, or cancer center social worker about creating a Survivorship Care Plan.
- Many major cancer centers automatically provide one at the end of treatment, but not all do—so it's okay to speak up and request one.
- If you've already finished treatment and don't have a plan yet, it's never too late to ask.

Your cancer journey doesn't end when treatment ends. A Survivorship Care Plan can help you move forward with clarity, confidence, and support. Bring the plan with you to future doctor visits so everyone is on the same page about your care.

## Practical and Financial Resources

**CancerCare**
**800-813-HOPE (800-813-4673)**
**cancercare.org/financial**

Provides financial aid for treatment-related expenses.

**Cancer and Careers**
**646-929-8032**
**cancerandcareers.org/en**

Empowers and educates people with cancer to thrive in their workplace by providing expert advice, interactive tools, and educational events.

**Cancer Financial Assistance Coalition (CFAC)**
**cancerfac.org**

Helps cancer patients manage their financial challenges.

**Cancer Legal Resource Center**
**866-843-2572**
**thedrlc.org/cancer**

Free education and referrals for legal concerns.

**Cleaning for a Reason**
**cleaningforareason.org**

Provides free home cleaning to patients.

**Family Reach**
**857-233-2764**
**familyreach.org**

Helps with financial planning and emergency relief.

**HealthWell Foundation**
**800-675-8416**
**healthwellfoundation.org**

Helps with copays and premium assistance.

**Lotsa Helping Hands**
**lotsahelpinghands.com**

Provides a central place to coordinate meals and help for friends and family.

**Ovarcome**
**713-800-2976**
**ovarcome.org**

Provides financial, psycho-social, and informational support to ovarian cancer patients.

**NCCS Survivorship Care Plan**
**877-NCCS-YES (877-622-7937)r**
**canceradvocacy.org**

Provides information about what care plans are and how they are used.

**NOCC Financial Assistance Program**
**888-OVARIAN (888-682-7426)**
**ovarian.org**

Offers financial assistance for those in treatment and/or in a clinical trial.

**NOCC Resource Navigation**
**888-OVARIAN (888-682-7426)**
**ovarian.org**

Offers case management support and financial navigation.

**PAN Foundation**
**panfoundation.org**

Assists with out-of-pocket costs for medications.

**Patient Advocate Foundation**
**800-532-5274**
**patientadvocate.org**

Offers case management and financial navigation.

**Sharsheret**
**866-474-2744**
**sharsheret.org**

Provides a financial wellness toolkit that includes vital resources.

**NOCC Meal Delivery Program-Teal Comfort for the Soul**
**888-OVARIAN (888-682-7426**
**ovarian.org**

Offers free, healthy meals to support you and your caregiver during ovarian cancer treatment.

**The Pink Fund**
**pinkfund.org**

Assists with non-medical expenses during treatment.

**Unite for HER**
**610-883-1177**
**uniteforher.org**

Provides free wellness programs that educate about integrative cancer care and provides access to supportive services and resources at no personal cost.

**Triage Cancer**
**424-258-7064**
**triagecancer.org**

Guides on employment rights, insurance, and disability.

## Guiding Words

Now that you've had a chance to read this guide, you are armed with information that can help you through this time. We know that the information may seem overwhelming at first. We know it is difficult to have to go through treatment for cancer.

We hope that the knowledge and understanding you may have gained by reading this guide gives you the strength to face the challenges that come with ovarian cancer. Treatment options for those with ovarian cancer are undergoing a revolution. There are treatments currently being studied to improve care and provide more options for people facing ovarian cancer..

This guide provides a lot of information, and we hope it is helpful as a reference. But remember, this guide is only a place to start. You must be your own best health advocate. If you have a question about your treatment, seek a second or even a third opinion.

As always, if you have any questions, feel free to contact us at 1-888-OVARIAN (682-7426) or visit our website, www.ovarian.org. If, for any reason, we are unable to answer your question, we will direct you to someone who can.

In the spirit of care and support, we encourage you to be kind to yourself and treasure every day by living life to the fullest.

## Find a Community Near You

Our communities span the country, encompassing local markets that make up our regions essential to fulfilling the NOCC mission. For survivors and their caregivers, it's a compassionate connection to ovarian cancer support groups, educational programs, events, and links to information and resources that follow them throughout their journey. For volunteers, it's the hub for donating the time and resources we need to raise awareness, support survivors and caregivers, fund research, and find a cure.

**To find a community near you, visit:**
**https://ovarian.org/get-involved/nocc-communities**

NATIONAL
OVARIAN CANCER
COALITION®

For more information, please contact us at:

**NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER COALITION**
12221 Merit Drive, Suite 1950 | Dallas, TX 75251

## 1-888-OVARIAN

(1-888-682-7426) or 214-273-4200

nocc@ovarian.org
ovarian.org

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