

Cancer that cannot be cured

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If cancer is not stopped by treatment, cancer cells can move from the place where the cancer began. They can spread through the blood or lymphatic system to other parts of the body. The cells can grow into a new cancer in a different part of the body. This is called metastasis. Cancer cells can spread to more than one place in the body.

Some cancers cannot be cured, even if they have not spread. Doctors should be able to tell whether it is possible to cure someone's cancer.

Treatment

Treatment can help control the symptoms and spread of cancer, even cancer that cannot be cured. Some people with cancer that cannot be cured have their cancer controlled for months or years. They may have several types of treatment in that time.

Some people join clinical trials. These test new treatments to see if they are better than existing treatments. If you are interested, ask your doctor if there is a clinical trial suitable for you.

Some people choose to stop having treatment. They prefer to use the time for other things. This is a personal decision. Talking to a doctor or counsellor can help.

Talking about the cancer

People have different emotions when they are told that their cancer cannot be cured. People can feel numb, angry, frightened and sad. Some people may cope better with cancer when they talk about their feelings. Often, people are not used to talking to family and friends about things that worry them. Talking to a counsellor can help.

There are support groups around Melbourne and in Victoria where people with cancer get together and talk. People find strength in sharing feelings. They often laugh, too.

If you have cancer, it can be hard to tell people about it. Telling young children can be especially hard. It is usually best to be truthful about what is happening and what may happen in the future.

Treating symptoms

Some people with cancer that cannot be cured do not have pain. Other people do have pain. For example, a cancer can grow big and press on an organ, causing pain. Treatment can relieve or soothe pain and other symptoms. For example, radiotherapy can make some cancers smaller, or cancer can be removed by surgery.

Pain is usually controlled well with medicines. A person is entitled to have medicines to relieve their pain. Some people worry that they will be addicted if they take drugs like morphine. Addiction is unlikely when these drugs are taken for cancer pain. If you have pain, let your nurse or doctor know so that it can be treated. If your family is worried about addiction, ask your doctor to reassure them.

You may wish to speak to a psychologist about ways to cope with pain. They can help you relax and learn to think about things other than your pain.

► *English*

Cancer information line:

- English
13 11 20

1 Rathdowne Street
Carlton Vic 3053
Australia
Telephone: 61 (0)3 9635 5000
Facsimile: 61 (0)3 9635 5270
enquiries@cancervic.org.au
www.cancervic.org.au

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Getting help

A person with cancer that cannot be cured may feel well. But sometimes the cancer makes the person feel sick or tired. Cancer treatment can also make a person feel unwell.

Friends and family will probably want to help. Things that they can do include helping with the house and garden and cooking. Sometimes it is good to have a friend with you when you have treatment.

Some people don't know how to cope when someone they care about has cancer. If you have cancer, and your family or friends are troubling you with their own worries, it can help to be honest about your own needs. If this is difficult, seek help from your doctor, nurse, the social worker at the hospital or other health professionals such as psychologists or psychiatrists.

Financial and other concerns

Money problems make it even harder to cope. People with cancer may need to get advice about taking leave from work or getting superannuation paid early. Employed and unemployed people can also find out if they are eligible for a sickness or disability payment.

People with cancer may also need information on things like making a will, powers of attorney (allowing other people to legally make decisions for them) and funerals. There is a lot of information available to help.

Getting more information

- Cancer – ask your doctor, or call our cancer information line.
- Support groups and information sessions – call our cancer information line.
- Pain and other symptoms – talk to your doctor or nurse.
- Help at home – the Royal District Nursing Service cares for people in their own home. Phone (03) 9536 5222. Local councils can tell you about services in your area. The social worker at your hospital may also be able to help.
- Nutrition, especially if you have nausea or are losing weight – talk to the dietitian at the hospital
- Legal matters – talk to your solicitor or legal adviser. If you don't have one, talk to the social worker at the hospital.
- Financial matters – social workers may be able to help. Centrelink can provide information on Commonwealth disability, sickness and carer payments. Phone 13 27 17 or visit Centrelink's website at www.centrelink.gov.au.
- Palliative care – a service that provides carers who help to comfort and care for people who are very sick. Care can be provided in hospital or at home. Phone Palliative Care Victoria (03) 9662 9644.
- Death and grief – a counsellor may be able to help, or a religious or spiritual adviser. There are also pastoral care workers in hospitals. The National Association for Loss and Grief can put people in touch with a grief counsellor in their area. Phone (03) 9351 0358 or 1800 100 123 (free call from country Victoria).

If you need an interpreter when talking to a health professional you should ask for one to be arranged. Remind your doctor, nurse or social worker to arrange and interpreter for you.

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