

CANCER CARE JOURNEY



**A Booklet To Assist Residents
of Newfoundland & Labrador
Along The Cancer Journey**

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Healthy Living and Prevention

Nearly half of all cancers can be prevented through healthy living. This includes eating a healthy diet, having a healthy body weight, being physically active, avoiding tobacco use and limiting alcohol.

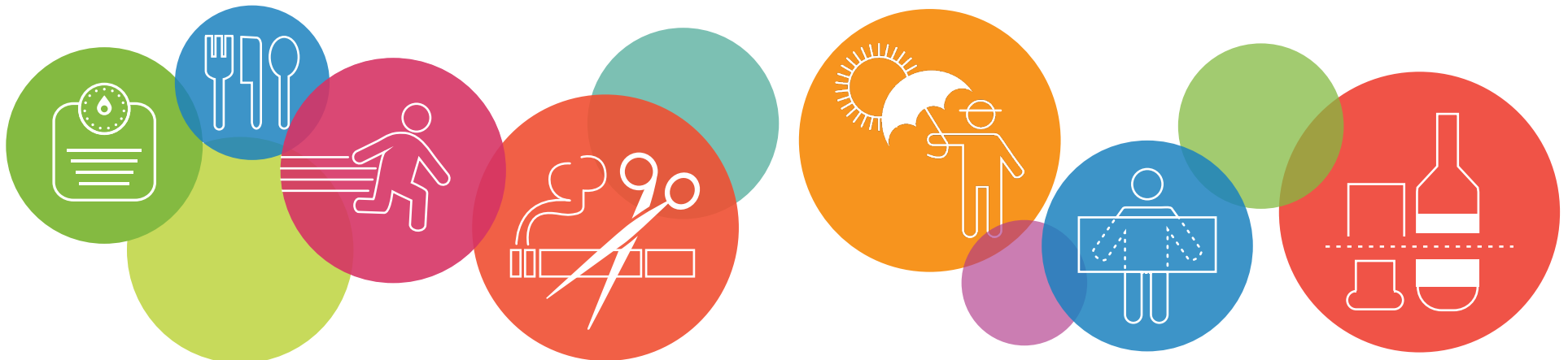
A healthy diet includes seven to ten servings of fruits and vegetables every day. It is important to include fiber in your diet. Fiber comes from foods such as beans, berries, bran, cabbage and other leafy greens. Red meat and processed foods (such as bacon and ham) should be eaten in moderation. Eating a good and balanced diet can help maintain a healthy body weight.

Activity is also key to a healthy lifestyle. Aim to do 30 minutes of physical activity that gets your heart going every day. Examples include taking a brisk walk; doing garden work such as raking, and mowing the lawn; and outdoor activities in the winter, such as snowshoeing or skiing, are also good exercise.

Another thing you can do to stay healthy is limit alcohol to one drink a day for women and two or less for men. If you smoke, the best thing you can do to improve your health is to quit. There are resources to help you quit, such as the Smokers Helpline at 1-800-363-5864.

You should protect your skin from the sun. While outside, be sure to use sun screen and wear long sleeved shirts and a wide brim hat. Sunglasses can also help protect your eyes from the sun.

For more tips on sun safety, go to the Canadian Cancer Society website at www.cancercare.ca. They have programs called “SunSense” and “It’s My Life.” If you have access to a computer and the internet, these programs can give you information about risk factors and things you can do to help improve your health.



Suspicion

You know how your own body looks and feels. If something doesn't seem right, go and see your doctor, nurse or nurse practitioner. The earlier a problem is found, the easier it is to treat. If you notice any of the following, go and get checked out:

- A new or unusual lump or swelling in any part of your body, especially in the breast or testicles.
- A sore that does not heal.
- Changes in the size, shape or colour of a mole or wart.
- Any new growth on the skin, or red or pink patches of skin that will not heal.
- A nagging cough that won't go away, especially if you are coughing up blood.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Blood in the urine (pee) or stool (poop).
- Unusual bleeding or discharge of any sort from the nipple or vagina.
- Changes in bladder habits.
- Heartburn or indigestion that won't go away.
- Unexplained weight loss, fever or feeling tired all the time.
- Changes in bowel habits such as constipation or diarrhea that lasts for more than a few weeks.
- Unexplained aches or pains.

These signs don't always mean you have cancer. They may be due to another problem, but you should go and get checked.



Screening

Screening tests help find some types of cancer before you have any symptoms. Tests are available for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer. Talk to your doctor or nurse about which screening tests are right for you.

Testing

If your screening test comes back with an unusual result, or your doctor wants to follow up on a problem you are having, you may need to have more tests done. You may need a biopsy, which involves removing a sample of tissue from your body and looking at it under a microscope for cancer cells. If you need a biopsy, ask your doctor for more details.

There are a number of X-rays that may be done, including a CT (Computerized Tomography) scan (it's also called a CAT or Computerized Axial Tomography scan), a MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) or a PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scan or a bone scan. If you need any of these tests, you will get more details from your health care team. You may also need to have some blood tests done, which will give your health care team more information about your health.



Diagnosis

The results of your tests will tell your health care team if you have cancer. Cancer is a disease that starts in our cells. Our bodies are made up of millions of cells that form tissues and organs, such as muscles and bones, the lungs and the liver. Genes inside each cell tell the cell to grow, work, reproduce and die. Sometimes, there is a mix-up, and the cells may form lumps or tumors, or spread through the blood system. These tumors can be benign (which means not cancerous) or malignant (which means they are cancerous). Benign tumors are not usually life threatening. Malignant tumors can spread to nearby tissues and other parts of the body. Cancer cells that spread to other parts of the body are called metastases.

If you have cancer, you may need more tests. The tests will tell the stage of the cancer, which is a term used to describe the level of cancer in the body. Stages are based on certain factors depending on the cancer type. Your tests will also show the grade of the cancer cell, which helps let your health care team know how quickly the cancer cells grow and how likely they are to spread. Knowing the grade and stage of your cancer helps your health care team plan your treatment.

Cancer Patient Navigators are located across the province. Their job is to assist and support you and your family so you can play an active role in your care. The Cancer Patient Navigator helps you and your family connect to the next step in your cancer journey. They can also help with emotional, spiritual, financial, transportation and other practical matters.

Aboriginal Patient Navigators are available to assist Aboriginal patients with any part of their care.

If you are diagnosed with cancer, you may be sent for cancer care services. These services are available in a number of clinics all across Newfoundland and Labrador. If you need to travel to St. John's for care, you may be seen by a doctor at the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Centre or the Ambulatory Treatment Unit, which are both located at the Health Sciences Centre.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Cancer Patient Navigators - (855) 848-3888

Aboriginal Patient Navigators - (709) 777-2199/2110



Treatment

Once a diagnosis has been made and the stage of the cancer is known, you may be offered treatment. The three main types of treatment are surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.



SURGERY is the removal of a tumor or cancerous tissue from your body. During surgery, your doctor will also remove a small amount of normal tissue all around the cancer. This is called the margin and is done to make sure there are no cancer cells left behind. Depending on the type of cancer, the surgeon may also remove lymph nodes that are close to the tumor. The lymph nodes are checked to see if they have cancer cells in them.



CHEMOTHERAPY and other drugs work in different ways to destroy cancer cells, stop them from spreading or slow down their growth. There are a number of drug therapies, the most well-known is chemotherapy, which is often just called chemo. Other drug therapies include hormones, biologics, or targeted therapy. Your doctor will explain which drugs you will need, how often you will get them and how they work. Your nurses and pharmacists will give you information about the drugs you will be getting.



RADIATION THERAPY is another type of treatment. In low doses, radiation is used for X-rays, to take pictures of inside your body. Radiation therapy for cancer treatment uses higher doses of radiation to destroy cancer cells. It works by damaging the cancer cells over and over again, as treatments are given every day during the week. If you need to have radiation therapy, you will have to travel to St. Johns. If you need help with finding a place to stay while you are in St. John's, the cancer patient navigators and social workers may be able to help you.



CLINICAL TRIALS are research studies that test new ways to detect, treat or manage cancer. If you are thinking of taking part in a clinical trial, talk to your doctor or health care team so you can make the best choice for you



CANCER CARE TEAMS are able to provide you with support while you are having treatment. Your doctors, nurses, radiation therapists and pharmacists will help you deal with any side effects you may experience from your treatment. Registered Dietitians can give you advice and answer any questions or concerns you may have about eating, diet and nutrition health. Social Work Counsellors work closely with your cancer care team and can help you and your family cope with the many challenges brought about by a cancer diagnosis.

Survivorship

Once your treatment is finished, you may find you have mixed feelings. You may be happy that your treatment is over, but worried about what the future holds. You have been through a lot, so make sure you keep getting the support you need. Give yourself some time to come to terms with what you have been going through and get back to your normal activities.

You will be followed by your cancer care team and your family doctor. Sometimes your visits may be through video conferencing (Telehealth), which will help you receive care closer to home. Your team will discuss the follow up plan with you.

There are some programs available for people following treatment. Ask about the programs that may be available to you.

In terms of going back to work and getting back to normal, talk to your cancer care team. Together, you can decide what will be best for you.



Palliative Care and Pain Management

In some cases, treatment may not cure the cancer or the cancer was in an advanced stage when the diagnosis was made. This is when palliative care and pain and symptom management becomes very important. The purpose of palliative care is not to cure the cancer, but to relieve symptoms, control the cancer, if possible, and improve quality of life. Palliative treatments can include radiation therapy, chemotherapy, surgery or medicines for pain or other symptoms.

Palliative care doesn't mean that doctors are giving up. It means that the focus of care changes from trying to cure the cancer to:

- making you as comfortable as possible;
- helping relieve symptoms, like pain or shortness of breath;
- keeping your quality of life as high as possible; or
- providing support during this time, which may be months or years.

If you have cancer, it is important to think about your future care and treatment. This is called advance care planning. Part of the planning includes telling your family and friends what kind of health and personal care you want if you ever can't speak for yourself. Talk to your health care team about advance care planning. They can help you make decisions about your care. You may decide to complete an Advance Health Care Directive which is a legal document used to put your health care wishes in writing in case you are not able to talk about your wishes. In this document, you can name a substitute decision maker, someone who will honor and follow your wishes if you can't speak for yourself.

You can find more information about advance care planning at www.advancecareplanning.ca.

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