Support for Adolescent and Young Adults with Cancer

Each year, around 89,000 individuals between the ages of 15-39 are diagnosed with cancer. This group is referred to as “AYA.” This is a unique population. You aren’t kids and you aren’t older adults. Your medical, emotional and practical needs may be different.

You can learn more about various types of cancer here. Treatment options can be found here. You can also learn more about medications used in cancer treatment here. If you have completed therapy, ask your team for a survivorship care plan (SCP) or complete your own SCP here.

Because cancers in AYAs are rare, it is important to find a cancer care team that is experienced in providing care to your age group. You may also want to find a trained mental health professional to help you cope with the emotional aspects of being an AYA survivor. Peer mentoring programs also offer connections with other AYA survivors.

Common Issues for AYAs in Cancer Care

Fertility
Some cancer treatments can impact your ability to have children in the future. This impacts both men and women. It is important to talk with your care team before, during, and after treatment about how your fertility may be impacted and about fertility preservation options.

You can find more learn more about fertility resources here.

Sexual Health and Relationships
Our bodies can also change as a result of cancer and cancer treatments. This can impact our self-image, our confidence, and also our physical ability for intimate relationships. It is important to think about your sexual health, desires, and abilities while going through cancer treatment and after. Learning to talk with your partner (or future partners) about your cancer history is also essential. More resources for sexual health and fertility can be found here.

Practical Issues
Just living with cancer day to day can present challenges. These include things like getting to appointments, paying for transportation and parking (especially if you have to go to a treatment center far from home for specialized AYA care), understanding your health insurance and maintaining your insurance coverage, balancing work and cancer, getting financial assistance for medical bills, making sure your healthcare decisions are respected and that you have a decision-maker if you aren’t able to make decisions for yourself, and planning for your children. If you are a student, you might be looking for financial aid resources.

Integrative Medicine
Many AYA’s are interested in incorporating integrative care into their treatment plan. This is also sometimes referred to as complementary or alternative medicine. It also includes the use of medical cannabis (marijuana). You can find more resources for integrative medicine here.

Transitions of Care
Individuals who were diagnosed with cancer as children or young adults will eventually need to transition their care to an adult oncology setting for ongoing follow-up care. These transitions in care can be challenging: new providers, new settings, new policies, and rules. Also for many AYA survivors, they are now the ones making their healthcare decisions-when before this was typically done by their parents. Planning ahead for these transitions can make a world of difference.
If you'd like to learn more about resources specific for AYAs, visit this page.

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