



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

Palliative Care

Palliative care is focused on improving the quality of life for people living with a serious illness like cancer. People with cancer may receive palliative care at any time from the point of diagnosis, throughout treatment, and beyond. The information here will help you learn more about palliative care.

Understanding Palliative Care

Palliative care helps patients and caregivers manage the symptoms of cancer and side effects of cancer treatment. Learn more about palliative care in this guide.

- [What Is Palliative Care?](#)
- [Who Should Get Palliative Care and Why?](#)
- [How and Where Is Palliative Care Provided and How Is It Paid For?](#)
- [Finding a Palliative Care Program](#)
- [Questions to Ask About Palliative Care](#)
- [Palliative Care Videos](#)

Managing Treatments and Side Effects

Find information about dealing with the side effects of cancer and cancer treatment, as well as what to consider if a treatment isn't working.

- [Side Effects](#)
- [Coping and Living Well During Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Complementary and Integrative Medicine](#)
- [If Cancer Treatments Stop Working](#)

More Palliative Care Resources



Palliative care may also be called supportive care, symptom management, or comfort care. And it's often a part of [hospice care](#)¹ if cancer is no longer being treated because it has worsened. No matter what it's called, palliative care has long been recognized as an important part of cancer care and treatment.

What's the difference between palliative care and hospice care?

- A hospice care team coordinates the majority of care for a patient, and communicates with the patient's medical care team.

To learn more, see [How and where is hospice care provided and how is it paid for?](#)³

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care/hospice-care.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/advanced-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care/hospice-care/who-provides-hospice-care.html
4. www.getpalliativecare.org/
5. www.caringinfo.org
6. palliativedoctors.org/
7. palliativedoctors.org/creating-a-plan/useful-resources
8. prc.coh.org/

Additional resources

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information on palliative care include:

GetPalliativeCare.org Website: www.getpalliativecare.org⁴

- Has information on palliative care for patients and home caregivers, including a directory for palliative care providers. **CaringInfo** Website: www.caringinfo.org⁵ Has information on hospice and palliative care, caregiving, advance care planning, grief and loss. **PalliativeDoctors** Website: palliativedoctors.org⁶⁷ Has a helpful list of resources for people living with serious illness and for their caregivers and loved ones

City of Hope Pain/Palliative Care Resource Center

Website: <http://prc.coh.org>⁸

- Web-based clearinghouse of information and resources to help patients and

families to improve the quality of pain management and palliative care

References

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). *Palliative care in oncology*. Accessed at <https://www.asco.org/practice-guidelines/cancer-care-initiatives/palliative-care-oncology> on April 2, 2019.

Doyle C. *Concurrent palliative care: Recommendations from the ASCO clinical practice guideline*. 2017. Accessed at <https://www.ascopost.com/issues/december-10-2017/concurrent-palliative-care-recommendations-from-the-asco-clinical-practice-guideline/> on April 2, 2019.

Ferrell BR, Temel JS, Temin S, Smith TJ. Integration of palliative care into standard oncology care: ASCO clinical practice guideline update summary. *Journal of Oncology Practice*. 2017; 13(2):119-121.

Krouse RS, Kamal AH. Interdisciplinary care for patients with advanced cancer. In DeVita VT, Lawrence TS, Rosenberg SA, eds. *DeVita, Hellman, and Rosenberg's Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology*. 11th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2019:2242-2247.

Marrelli TM. *Hospice and Palliative Care Handbook*. Indianapolis, IN: Sigma Theta Tau International; 2018.

Nabati L, Abrahm JL. Caring for patients at the end of life. In Niederhuber JE, Armitage JO, Kastan MB, Doroshow JH, Tepper JE, eds. *Abeloff's Clinical Oncology*. 6th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:751-763.

National Cancer Institute (NCI). *Palliative care in cancer*. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/advanced-cancer/care-choices/palliative-care-fact-sheet> on April 2, 2019.

National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN). *Palliative care*. Version 1.2019. Accessed at www.nccn.org on April 2, 2019.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Institute on Aging (NIA). *What are palliative care and hospice care?* Accessed at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-are-palliative->

care-and-hospice-care on April 2, 2019.

Sherman DW, Matzo M, Metheny T. The interprofessional practice of palliative care nursing. In ML Matzo, ed. *Palliative Care Nursing*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company; 2014:3-20.

Last Revised: August 25, 2023

Who Should Get Palliative Care and Why?

- [Why palliative care is important in cancer care](#)
- [Benefits of palliative care](#)

Any person diagnosed with a serious illness who is having symptoms should get palliative care. People with complex medical problems, for instance, someone who is diagnosed with and being treated for heart failure, kidney disease, diabetes, or cancer, should get palliative care. These serious illnesses often lead to physical, [emotional](#)¹, spiritual, and social problems that go beyond what the medical team can provide.

Why palliative care is important in cancer care

For cancer patients, it's important to remember that the effects of cancer and its treatment can be very different from person to person. A palliative care team includes a group of specialists who look at each person's situation and work together to help the patient and caregiver with various types of needs. The palliative care team can help by:

- Controlling physical symptoms and [side effects](#)²
- Managing [emotions](#)³ that come with a cancer diagnosis and treatment
Showing the family ways to [coping](#)⁴

Palliative care should be offered and be available from the time of diagnosis until it's no longer needed – at any stage and in any care setting.

Benefits of palliative care

There are many studies that show the benefits of palliative care on the well-being of patients and their families or caregivers. For example, studies have shown that patients who have palliative care visits while in the hospital spend less time in intensive care units and are less likely to visit the emergency room or to be re-admitted to the hospital after they go home. Studies have also shown that people with chronic illnesses, like cancer, who get palliative care have less severe symptoms. They have better quality of life, less pain, less shortness of breath, less depression, and less nausea.

Research has also shown that cancer patients receiving palliative care have better emotional health. This may be because their medical care tends to better align with their values, goals, and preferences. Their families also feel more satisfied with the patient's care.

Some studies have also suggested that starting palliative care soon after a cancer diagnosis may also extend survival.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/changes-in-mood-or-thinking.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/changes-in-mood-or-thinking.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/caregivers.html
www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/advance-directives.html

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information on palliative care include:

GetPalliativeCare.org Website: www.getpalliativecare.org⁸

- Has information on palliative care for patients and home caregivers, including where to find palliative care programs in your state

City of Hope Pain/Palliative Care Resource Center Website: <http://prc.coh.org>⁹

- Web-based clearinghouse of information and resources to help patients and families to improve the quality of pain management and palliative care

References

Dunn GP, Pruskowski J, Simonian LK. Palliative care for cancer and treatment-related changes for inpatients. In Hopewood P, Milroy MJ, eds. *Quality Cancer Care: Survivorship Before, During, and After Treatment*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company; 2018:199-216.

Ferrell BR, Temel JS, Temin S, Smith TJ. Integration of palliative care into standard oncology care: ASCO clinical practice guideline update summary. *Journal of Oncology Practice*. 2017; 13(2):119-121.

Flaherty C, Fox K, McDonah D, Murphy J. Palliative care screening. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*. 2018; 22(4):E92-E96.

Gomes B, Calanzani N, Curiale V, McCrone P, Higginson IJ. Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of home palliative care services for adults with advanced illness and their caregivers. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. 2013; 6(6):CD007760.

Hagmann D, Cramer A, Kestenbaum A, Durazo C....Roeland EJ. Evidence-based palliative care approaches to non-pain physical symptom management in cancer patients. *Seminars in Oncology Nursing*. 2018; 34(3):227-240.

Krouse RS, Kamal AH. Interdisciplinary care for patients with advanced cancer. In DeVita VT, Lawrence TS, Rosenberg SA, eds. *DeVita, Hellman, and Rosenberg's Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology*. 11th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2019:2242-2247.

Thomas TH, Jackson VA, Carlson H, Rinaldi S....Greer JA. Communication differences between oncologists and palliative care clinicians: A qualitative analysis of early, integrated palliative care in patients with advanced cancer. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 2018; 22(1):41-49.

Last Revised: May 10, 2019

How and Where Is Palliative Care Provided and How Is It Paid For?

- [Where palliative care is given](#)
- [How palliative care is paid for](#)

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information on palliative care

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO). *Facts and figures: Hospice care in America*. Updated 6/16/16

Finding a Palliative Care Program

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services.html
2. getpalliativecare.org/provider-directory/
3. www.nhpco.org/find-a-care-provider/
4. www.getpalliativecare.org/
5. prc.coh.org/

Additional resources

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information on palliative care include:

GetPalliativeCare.org Website: www.getpalliativecare.org⁴

- Has information on palliative care for patients and home caregivers, including where to find palliative care programs in your state

City of Hope Pain/Palliative Care Resource Center Website: <http://prc.coh.org>⁵

Questions to Ask About Palliative Care

- How do I find out if I'm eligible?
- What is included in palliative care that's different from the care you can give me?
- Who will be part of my palliative care team?
- How do I receive palliative care?

DeVita VT, Lawrence TS, Rosenberg SA, eds. *DeVita, Hellman, and Rosenberg's Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology*. 11th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2019:2242-2247.