

The After Cancer Treatment Blahs

For many people the months following cancer treatment are more difficult than the treatment itself.

During treatment, your “job” is to be in treatment. You’re busy with appointments and you see doctors almost every week. At the same time, friends bring you meals, family members take on extra duties, and you’re left to focus on getting better.

Then you have your last radiation therapy treatment or chemotherapy session. Hugs all around. Everything in your life is suddenly back to normal. Right?

No way. You probably feel anything but normal. Your body is tired. Your brain is muddled. And you’re worried that the cancer will come back.

Making the transition back to your normal life is difficult. In fact, you probably aren’t even sure what “normal” is anymore.

What makes it especially hard is that the people around you often expect you to bounce back almost immediately. While they were happy to help you during treatment, they now see you as recovered and expect you to carry your old load.

This is so common that I try to prepare people undergoing cancer treatment for what might follow:

1. Expect a post-treatment slump. Rather than being a time of celebration, the last treatment is sometimes the beginning of a funk. If you expect that funk, it won’t be so difficult.
2. Realize that recovery is not a straight line. You’ll feel better one day but worse the next. That’s normal.
3. Expect recovery to take several months. Some people say that the recovery phase takes as long as the

treatment phase. It took me a full year following chemotherapy to really feel like myself again.

4. Expect to be acutely aware of every ache and pain and immediately think the worst. Every headache is an ominous sign of a brain tumor instead of just a normal headache. This is especially true in the days before a return trip to your doctor. Everyone goes through this.

5. Expect your family and friends to have less time to sit with you and listen to your concerns about living with cancer. Joining a support group or speaking with a therapist can be especially helpful during this transition phase.

6. Most of all, be patient with those around you and especially with yourself.

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