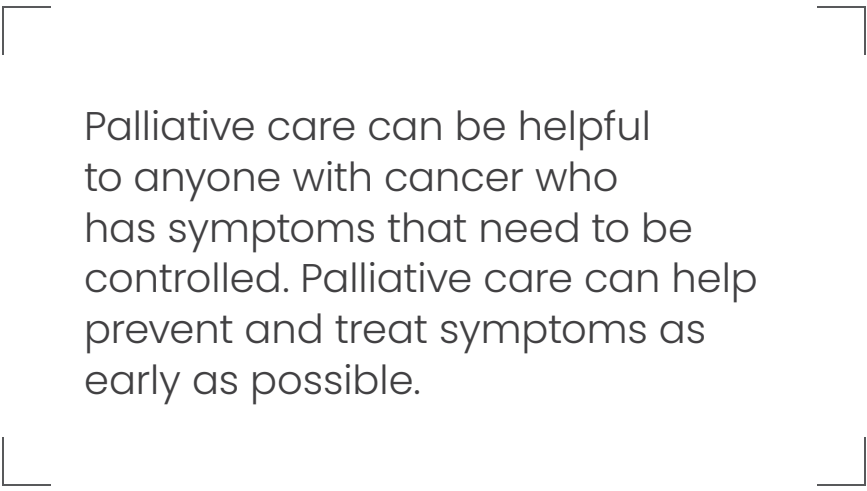




# **Palliative Care:** Improving Quality of Life for Anyone With Cancer





Palliative care can be helpful to anyone with cancer who has symptoms that need to be controlled. Palliative care can help prevent and treat symptoms as early as possible.

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**Palliative care is provided by a team of specially trained health care professionals who help manage mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual issues.**

# What is palliative care?

Palliative care is health care that focuses on improving the quality of life for people with a serious illness, such as cancer, and their caregivers and family. Palliative care may also be called supportive care, symptom management, or comfort care.

Palliative care is important because cancer and its treatment can cause physical, emotional, spiritual, and social problems. Palliative care can provide:

- Better control of symptoms from cancer and the side effects of treatment
- Help coping with feelings that come with cancer
- A chance to talk about spiritual concerns
- Resources to support the needs of caregivers
- Support for families that are coping with life and family changes
- Help with money, work, school, and insurance issues
- Help with the transitions to different care settings, including to hospice care when needed

Palliative care can be started soon after diagnosis, and it can be part of your care before, during, and after cancer treatment. Anytime a person with cancer is expected to have or has symptoms or problems that need expert care, palliative care can be helpful. If started early, palliative care might even help you avoid some side effects.

# Palliative care versus hospice care

Palliative care is not the same as hospice care. While they share some of the same goals, they are different types of care.

Palliative care:

- Is for anyone who needs help with the effects of a serious illness
- Can be given at any point in an illness
- May be given along with treatment meant to cure or control cancer

Hospice care:

- Is for the person who is nearing the end of their life
- Treats the person and symptoms, rather than treating the cancer itself
- Focuses on helping the person have the highest quality of life in the remaining time they have

## Benefits of palliative care

Palliative care helps people have less severe symptoms and side effects, such as pain, shortness of breath, depression, and nausea. This can improve their quality of life.

Palliative care can also:

- Lower the chance that a person with cancer will need to go to the emergency room or be readmitted to the hospital

- Help a person better cope with their cancer and their emotions
- Increase a family's satisfaction with their loved one's care

Plus, starting palliative care soon after a cancer diagnosis may help some people live longer.

## Palliative care at any age

Palliative care is helpful for people with cancer at all ages. However, children, teens, young adults, and older adults may have unique needs.

Children may:

- Need help dealing with fear and anxiety
- Feel isolated from friends and school
- Need help understanding cancer and treatment

Teens may:

- Feel isolated from friends and school
- Not see others their age in cancer settings
- Wish to be more independent but need to rely on their parents
- Need to be part of decisions about their care
- Not know how to tell friends what's going on
- Worry about their future

Young adults may:

- Feel isolated when they don't see others their age in cancer settings
- Wish to be independent, but still need to rely on their parents
- Have concerns about money, not being able to work, or having limited or no insurance
- Worry about dating, marrying, and having children
- Already be starting a family and be worried about how cancer will affect their family

Older adults often have:

- Other health problems
- A lower level of energy and ability to function
- A higher risk for more severe side effects from treatment





# What is it like to get palliative care?

The cancer care team that is giving your treatment will often start palliative care. They may help manage symptoms and side effects like nausea or pain. And they will continue to help control these problems while you are getting treatment.

But you may also need the help of a palliative care team. A palliative care team is separate but works with the cancer care team that's giving your treatment.

Palliative care teams often include specially trained doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacists, and social workers. Your team might also include a dietitian, patient navigator, and pastoral counselor or chaplain. They might see you during clinic visits, or they might visit you if you are in the hospital.

Each person experiences the effects of cancer and its treatment in their own way. Your palliative care team will work with you, your family, and other caregivers to understand your needs and develop a plan.

They might prescribe medicines or other treatments to help manage symptoms or side effects of cancer treatment. They may also provide counseling to help you deal with any emotional, spiritual, or social problems.

The palliative care team also provides support to caregivers and other family members who need help coping with new responsibilities and feelings. Palliative care can help lessen the burden for caregivers of people with cancer.

## Finding palliative care

In most cases, your doctor or cancer care team can start palliative care. But if palliative care is not offered where you are, your cancer care team can refer you to a palliative care provider or team. Even if your cancer care team has not brought up palliative care, you can ask about it at any time.

If you want to learn more or would like to talk to more than one palliative care provider or team, these groups might be helpful:

- Center to Advance Palliative Care – **[getpalliativecare.org](http://getpalliativecare.org)**
- National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization – **[caringinfo.org](http://caringinfo.org)**

## Paying for palliative care

Government and private insurance plans often pay for palliative care. But it's important to check and see if there are any limits to the coverage. For example, nursing visits, social work, and spiritual care are sometimes covered. Medicines and other things to help control symptoms may be covered.

There might also be limits based on where palliative care is given (such as at home or in the hospital). Ask your health insurance company if they have a list of preferred palliative care providers, teams, or centers.

# Questions to ask about palliative care

If your health care team has mentioned or offered palliative care, you may want to learn more. Ask these questions to learn about your options:

- How do you think palliative care might help me?
- What can palliative care offer that's different from the care you can give me?
- Who would be part of my palliative care team?
- Where would I get palliative care?
- Do I need to check with my insurance company about coverage for palliative care?
- How long will my palliative care last?
- What will the palliative care team do if my symptoms get worse? What if my symptoms get better?
- How will you communicate with the palliative care team?
- How might my family and friends be involved in palliative care?
- What decisions do I need to make? Can you help me with those decisions?



This booklet gives you information about palliative care for people with cancer. It will tell you what palliative care is, how it can help, who should get it, where to get it, and how to find and pay for it. The booklet also includes questions to ask about palliative care.

For cancer information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at **cancer.org** or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.



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