



*“When will I
feel better?”*

Dealing with **physical problems**
after cancer treatment

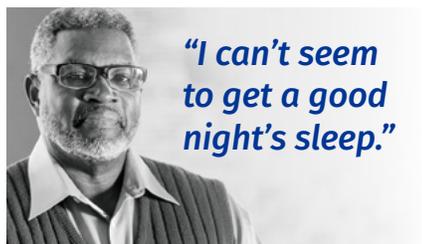
HELP FROM
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In the period after cancer treatment, you may find yourself facing all kinds of **physical problems**.

You're a cancer survivor – and really, “survivorship” began when you were first diagnosed – but your body may be having trouble adjusting to post-treatment life.

Here's what Georgians who have finished cancer treatment often say about the physical issues they face:



“I can't seem to get a good night's sleep.”

You might be waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to sleep. Or you may just have a problem falling asleep in the first place. This lack of sleep – insomnia – has a lot to do with how you feel during the day.



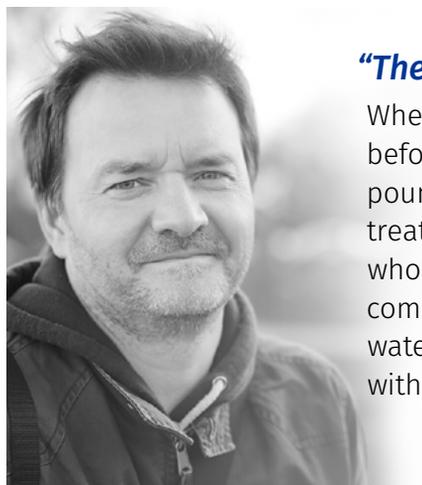
“Sex isn't what it used to be.”

It may be that your sexual function is reduced. Or that it's difficult being intimate with your spouse or partner again. Sexual health is part of overall health, and all that you've been through in being treated for cancer can affect it.



“I'm having trouble concentrating.”

“I've got chemo brain!” is what some people say about feeling “foggy” because of chemotherapy. But it can go beyond that. You might have trouble remembering things or thinking clearly. This is especially true of survivors of breast cancer.



“The weight just won't come off.”

Whether you had problems with weight before cancer, it's common to add pounds in the months and years after treatment. For some survivors, there's a whole other issue – swelling. This can come from your body holding onto water. Or it could be more serious, as with the condition lymphedema.



“The pain won't go away.”

You would think that pain would only happen during treatment, not afterward. But for many people, surgery and chemotherapy can bring all kinds of lasting pain symptoms. This can make it very hard to live life fully.

▼ **If these symptoms sound familiar, here are a few things to keep in mind...**

It helps to know



Mind and body influence each other.

Treating physical problems after being treated for cancer isn't always about taking medicine. A huge part of it is getting your mind in the game. There are all kinds of ways to use the mind to make the body feel better.



Pain affects some people more than others.

One out of three cancer survivors have chronic pain, which is defined as pain felt “most days (or every day) for six months.” As a survivor, you're more likely to experience pain if you have low income, are unemployed or on public insurance. And pain is typically hardest on people who have had cancer of the bone, kidney, throat or uterus. For most, pain gets better as time goes on.



Lack of sleep is more serious than it looks.

You might think it's a small matter, especially since as many as three out of four survivors have some kind of sleep disorder. But not getting enough sleep affects just about every other physical problem, as well as anxiety and depression.



If you're having trouble with weight, don't be too hard on yourself.

Weight gain for survivors can be tied to so many causes. Your body may be holding more fluid. The medication may bring weight gain as a side effect – or cause you to crave certain foods. The rate that your body uses energy might have slowed down.



Get help, even if your physical problems feel embarrassing.

You may have trouble controlling bowel movements. Issues with sexual health can be hard to talk about. Unexpected swelling may be awkward to bring up. But the quality of your life is important. By dealing with physical problems after cancer treatment, you take steps to a more enjoyable life.

Now, the good news: You can get help dealing with all of these physical issues.

What you can do right now

“You are not alone. You have to put yourself out there and tell people you need help. Go to a support group, even if you just listen.”



— TeMaya Eatmon, breast cancer survivor

Talk to your doctor.

You'll still have appointments with your doctor after finishing treatment. Plan to talk to him or her about any physical problem or challenge you have, even if that's a little hard to do.

Find and choose the best ways to manage pain.

The physical pain that cancer survivors face is managed much the same way as the pain everyone else faces – through all kinds of physical and mental activities in addition to medication. Your relief begins by learning about different methods and trying some – or talking with your doctor about them.

The most important thing to remember is there's hardly ever just one solution. You may need to try several things at once to find what works best for you. The nonprofit LiveStrong has a really good overview of the different ways to manage your pain.

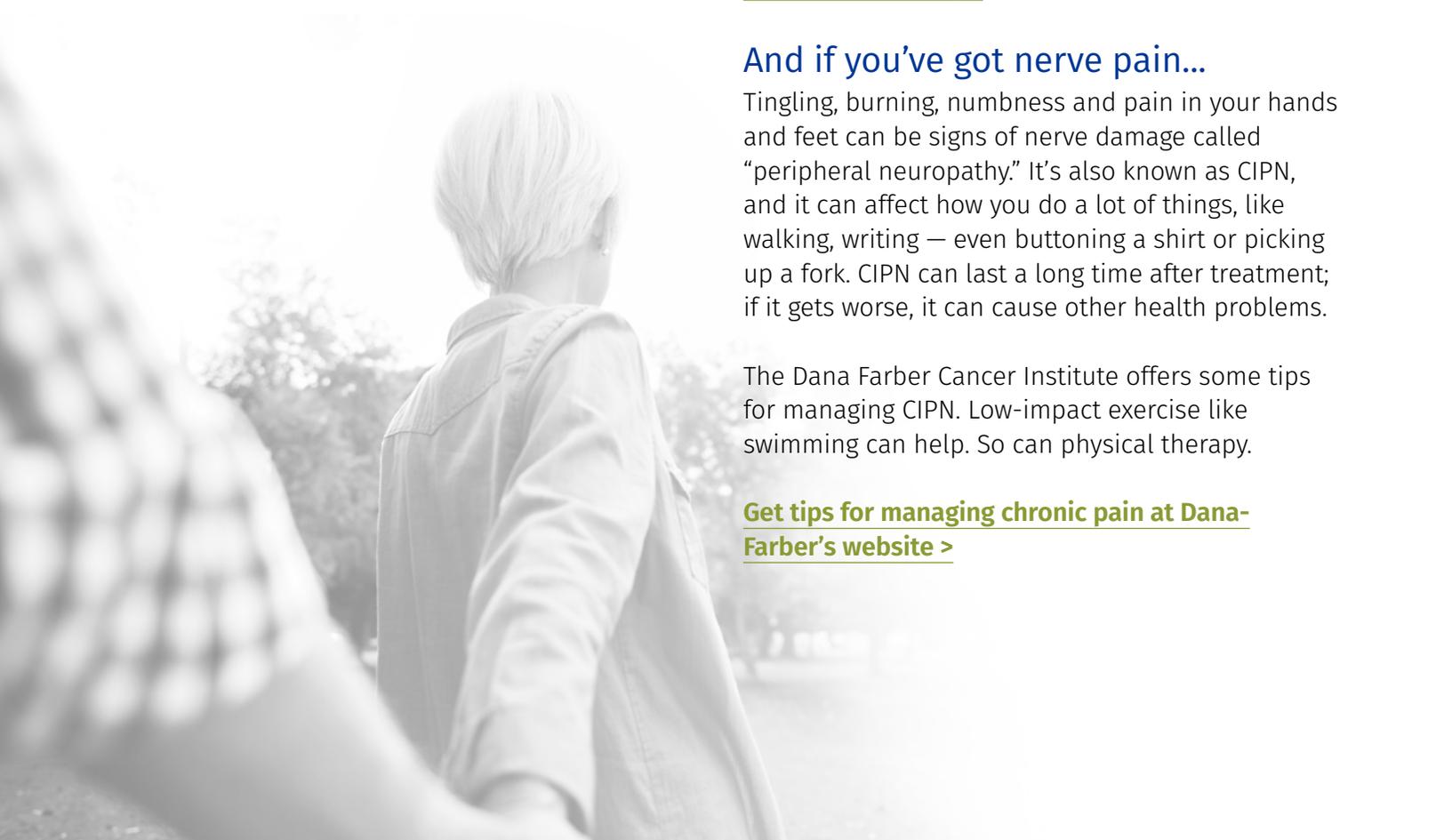
[Learn more about managing chronic pain at the website LiveStrong >](#)

And if you've got nerve pain...

Tingling, burning, numbness and pain in your hands and feet can be signs of nerve damage called “peripheral neuropathy.” It's also known as CIPN, and it can affect how you do a lot of things, like walking, writing — even buttoning a shirt or picking up a fork. CIPN can last a long time after treatment; if it gets worse, it can cause other health problems.

The Dana Farber Cancer Institute offers some tips for managing CIPN. Low-impact exercise like swimming can help. So can physical therapy.

[Get tips for managing chronic pain at Dana-Farber's website >](#)



A better night's sleep begins with a counselor.

Sleep is physical rest, but getting to sleep is a matter of the mind. One treatment for insomnia is a form of counseling called CBT (for “cognitive behavioral therapy”). Your doctor can recommend a counselor; also, CBT is often offered by VA and public health clinics. After you start with a counselor or therapist, ask him or her about a mobile app called CBT-i Coach. It can help your better-sleep plan.

- ▶ A hospital near you may offer counseling to help you sleep better. To find out, visit the hospital's website and enter **cancer survivor** counseling in the Search box. Then get in touch with a counselor.

[Get tips for better sleep from the website Insomnia Coach >](#)

- ▶ You might also participate in a “sleep study.” Visit the website of hospitals closest to you and enter **sleep disorder** into the Search box.

There's a plan to lose that extra weight.

Studies show that gaining weight during cancer treatment can affect how fast and how completely you recover. Unfortunately, treatment itself – chemotherapy, steroids and other medications – can be the cause of weight gain. To lose weight, the best thing you can do is to work with your doctor or a registered dietitian to come up with a healthy plan.

[Explore ways to lose weight after cancer >](#)

[Find a registered dietician / nutritionist near you >](#)

[Here are 8 tips for managing weight after cancer treatment >](#)

Find your way back to intimacy.

Many cancer survivors say they have concerns about sex and intimacy. One study showed that two out of three survivors were worried about sexual health after treatment. The most common issues are about desire for sex and about performance. There's also the matter of intimacy; some survivors describe feeling emotionally disconnected from their partner or spouse after having fought cancer.

Sex and intimacy can be uncomfortable to discuss with your doctor. But if you're unsettled about it, know that your concern is very common, and try to talk about it. Also, the website CancerSupportCommunity.org has some helpful information, including an hour-long radio program on the topic.

[Listen to the radio program on intimacy >](#)

You can get relief for swelling and fluid build-up.

Cancer surgery and radiation treatment can bring a build-up of fluid in your lymph nodes. These nodes are in several places in your body – meaning you could have a lot of swelling in certain areas. The swelling is a condition called lymphedema, and if you think your swelling isn't normal, see a doctor about it right away.

There are several kinds of treatments for lymphedema, from compression garments to massage to diet changes. The website at Johns Hopkins Medicine has an excellent overview of the disease and its treatments.

[Visit Johns Hopkins' website to learn about treating lymphedema >](#)

4 good ways to learn more

When looking for more information on survivorship, it's easy to get overwhelmed. There's so much out there. To help guide you through whatever physical challenges you face, we've found four good places to start.

1 Website: GeorgiaCancerInfo.org



This website serves Georgians with cancer – and an entire area is dedicated to helping you learn how to deal with physical issues after treatment. Click on Survivorship, then Physical Health box. You'll see a list of resources, each around a specific topic or issue.

[Visit: GeorgiaCancerInfo.org](http://GeorgiaCancerInfo.org)

2 Website: Side Effects from Treatment

If you just want to know more about the many different physical side effects from treatment, the nonprofit ASCO has a good web page. You can learn about specific problems, what might have caused them – even get questions to ask your healthcare team.

[Learn about: Physical Side Effects](#)

3 Help Line: 888-793-9355



If you just don't know where to turn, start with the Cancer Support Help Line. A trained volunteer will talk with you and

then provide ways to help. The toll-free line is run by a nonprofit called Cancer Support Community. Hours: Monday – Friday 9 a.m.–9 p.m. Eastern Time; Saturday – Sunday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Eastern Time.

- ▶ Call: 888-793-9355 and follow the instructions to talk with a helpful associate.

4 Booklet: “Facing Forward: Life After Cancer Treatment”

The National Cancer Institute created this guide in 2019 – and it's a good one. An entire section is about “Ways to Manage Physical Changes.” It provides more information on the topics in this brochure and gives you great advice on how to manage physical issues. You can download it as a .pdf or to your device.

[Get: Facing Forward Guide](#)