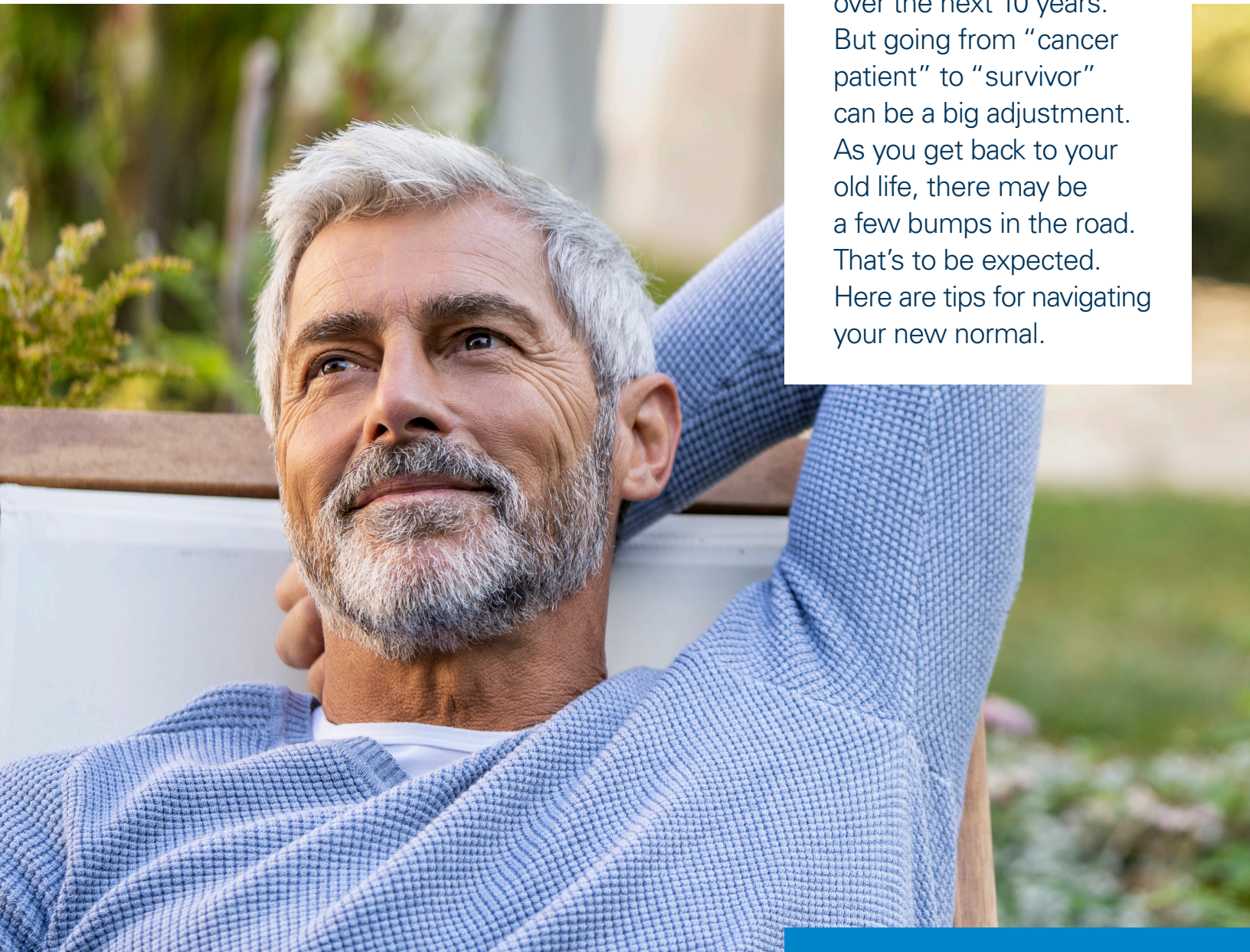




Kansas City

YOUR POST-CANCER LIFE: HOW TO MOVE FORWARD WITH LESS STRESS AND MORE HOPE

Your cancer treatments are over and that's a reason to celebrate. After all, the outlook is promising. There are 18 million cancer survivors in the United States, and more people than ever are expected to become survivors over the next 10 years. But going from "cancer patient" to "survivor" can be a big adjustment. As you get back to your old life, there may be a few bumps in the road. That's to be expected. Here are tips for navigating your new normal.





Focus on what you can control

Having cancer is difficult. So, it's no wonder you're a little worried it might come back. Fear of recurrence is a top source of stress after cancer treatment. The best way to cope: Control what you can. Leave the rest alone. "Whether or not your cancer comes back is ultimately not in your control," says Claire Conley, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in cancer. "But there are things you can do to stay healthy otherwise." Here are some steps you can take to stay strong, relieve stress, and feel your best.

Step 1: Stay on top of your follow-up screenings and other appointments. This is one of the best ways to catch and treat cancer early if you do have a recurrence.

Step 2: Follow a healthy lifestyle. Eat nutritious meals, get plenty of physical activity, and stay connected with other people. Get back to the hobbies and activities that bring you joy. These habits can also boost your mood.

Step 3: Look for the warning signs. Ask your cancer care team for a list of "red flags" to watch out for. This way you'll know which symptoms are normal and which

ones you should call your oncologist about. That can help you manage your fear of recurrence, says psychologist Andrea Bradford, Ph.D.

Step 4: Share your feelings and concerns. Lean on the people who care about you most for support. If you can, open up to family and friends. You might also join a support group for cancer survivors. Or consider finding a therapist who can help you sort through your feelings.

My stress-relief action plan

When I'm feeling stressed, I can take these steps to move forward:

We're here to help
The free Blue KC Care Management app makes it easy to access cancer support. Download it from the App Store or Google Play, and use the access code *kclinksupport* to get started. Prefer to talk? Call **816-395-2060**. Calls will be returned no later than the next business day.



Prepare to switch back to primary care

During treatment, you got used to daily or weekly trips to your doctor or hospital. These visits connected you with caring professionals who were always ready with advice and support. They also put you in touch with other patients going through the same experience.

Now you're shifting from your oncologist back to your primary care provider (PCP). You'll have less frequent check-ins, which can make you feel a little lost or lonely. In fact, most cancer survivors say they find going back to primary care confusing, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For a smoother transition, work with your cancer team on a cancer survivor plan. "That's a document the oncologist can give to the

primary care provider that lets them know some of the details about your disease," says Bradford. It also tells your provider about the kind of treatment you received and what you might expect in the future.

Just knowing that there's a plan – and good communication between your cancer care team and your primary care doctor – can help lower your anxiety. Some information your care team might include in your plan:

Things I want my primary care provider to know about my experience:

- The kind of cancer you had, including stage and extent
- The treatments you received and what you might expect in the future
- The side effects you experienced during treatment, plus suggestions for your PCP on how to help you manage any lingering side effects
- The names and contact information for providers on your cancer team



Expect people to ask you questions

Now that your treatment is over, be prepared for some people in your life to ask you about your experience. It's important to remember that they mean well. They want to know how you're doing because they care about you.

Friends and neighbors probably offered many kinds of support during your treatment. Maybe they delivered meals, sent cards, or reached out in countless other ways. So it's natural that they're curious. But you may not want to talk about your treatment. That's okay.

You might want to plan ahead. Think about what you want to share. And know exactly how you'll tell people that you'd rather not discuss it. "Having a line ready is helpful," says Conley. "Then you can change the subject."

So, if people ask you questions you don't want to answer, you could reply,

"Thank you for asking." Then follow up with your one-liner. (Practicing in front of a mirror or with a loved one first can help.) Some examples:

"Can we talk about something else?"

"My treatment is over. I'm doing well and ready to focus on the future."

"I don't really feel like talking about it right now."

My one-liners

When I don't feel like talking about my treatment, here are some things I can say:

Cancer support at your fingertips

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Take time to recharge

Cancer treatment takes a lot out of you. When it's all over, it's common to feel physically and mentally tired for a while. That can be tough, since you might be eager to jump back in to your favorite pre-cancer activities. These strategies can help you get back on track.

Get moving. But start out easy. Walking may be a good option because you can begin with short walks and build up gradually. Plus, it gets you outdoors. And walking with others provides the social connections that can boost your mood.

Listen to your body. Fatigue affects everyone differently. Maybe you feel tired in the morning and you rev up as the day gets going. If that sounds familiar, you might schedule activities in the afternoon. Are you an early bird? You might need to take a nap later on in the day. Figure out what works for you. Your internal "clock" may not be set quite the same as it was before.



Pace yourself. You've just been through a challenging experience. Pacing is a good way to save energy, by switching from periods of activity to periods of rest. Spend half an hour doing an activity, like having coffee with a friend or answering emails. Set the timer on your phone so you'll know it's time to stop. Then, follow up with 15 minutes of rest.

Stay positive. Focusing on the future can help you adjust to your post-cancer life, Conley says. A lot of people who have gone through cancer

feel the need to reprioritize things in their life. Maybe it's spending more time with your family, traveling more, or exploring new hobbies. That can be a big help as you move beyond treatment. To get started, jot some ideas in the space below.

Try to notice good things, no matter how small, when they happen. You can even write them down in a journal. Studies show that a positive, hopeful attitude is connected to long-term cancer survival. Joining a cancer survivor's support group can also help.

Positive changes I'd like to make in my life:

Sources: National Cancer Institute; American Cancer Society; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention