

# Palliative Care

## What Is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is a specialty of medicine and nursing that focuses on controlling symptoms, relieving suffering, and providing support for patients with any serious illnesses, including cancer. Palliative care can help patients with any type or stage of cancer. Patients can receive palliative care while also receiving cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery. Patients who receive palliative care often report improved quality of life. Patients who receive palliative care early in their disease course may live longer than if they did not receive palliative care, or received it later in the disease course.

Palliative care teams are usually made up of physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, pharmacists, and sometimes include physician assistants, nutritionists, as well as physical and occupational therapists. They work in many settings, including hospitals, outpatient clinics, and sometimes in nursing homes or patient homes.

## Who Should Receive Palliative Care, and When?

Palliative care may be appropriate for you if:

- You have advanced cancer, or
- You experience difficult-to-treat pain or other symptoms, or
- You or your family need more help coping with the diagnosis, or
- You or your family need help deciding about further treatments.

Patients and oncologists work together to form treatment plans. Oncologists are trained to manage common symptoms, such as pain and nausea, and to provide emotional support. Sometimes the burden of the disease is high and requires more time and skill than an oncologist can provide. Palliative care specialists can step in and use their expertise to help manage distressing symptoms and provide emotional support.

Medicare, Medicaid, and most commercial insurances cover palliative care referrals.

## What Are the Benefits of Palliative Care?

Together with your oncologist, palliative care can:

- Help manage previously difficult-to-treat symptoms from the cancer or treatment side effects, such as pain, constipation, and shortness of breath.
- Guide patients and their caretakers through the course of their disease and help with what to expect at each stage.
- Provide practical, emotional, and spiritual support for the patient and their family.
- Access specialized services, such as support groups and home supports.

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**Palliative care** is a medical and nursing specialty for patients with a serious illness, including any stage or type of cancer.

It is not limited to end-of-life care and can be used alongside anticancer therapy.

- ▶ Involves a multidisciplinary health care team and can be administered in multiple settings (inpatient, clinic, or home)

- ▶ Is used to anticipate, prevent, and treat physical symptoms as well as emotional and financial stress

- ▶ Provides patients and family with emotional and spiritual support and guidance through health care decision making

- Help you determine a spokesperson in the event that you are too sick to make medical decisions, and assist with medical decisions when the cancer is difficult to treat.

## Is Palliative Care the Same as Hospice Care?

No. Palliative care can be involved in your care at any point during a serious illness, such as cancer. Although both palliative care and hospice treat the patient's symptoms with the goal to improve their quality of life, hospice care focuses on end-of-life care. Hospice can be appropriate when patients are not expected to live more than 6 months and comfort is the primary focus of care.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Cancer Society: Palliative or Supportive Care  
<https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/palliative-care.html>

Cancer.Net: Doctor-approved patient information from ASCO  
<https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/how-cancer-treated/palliative-care/caring-symptoms-cancer-and-its-treatment>

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