



Palliative Care

The What, Who, When, Where, Why, and How

What is palliative care? Palliative care is an approach to alternative treatments that reduces pain and other symptoms to improve quality of life and promote patient choice. It focuses on improving how you feel during treatment by managing symptoms and supporting your non-medical needs.

Who is palliative care for? Palliative care is for anyone who may be dealing with decreased quality of life as a result of his or her cancer diagnosis. It can be used at any time during any phase of cancer treatment – early stage, recurrent, advanced-stage, or metastatic. Treatments vary widely and often can include: medication, nutritional changes, relaxation techniques, and therapy.

When is palliative care right for me? Palliative care can be used at any point during your cancer treatment. Talk to your doctor about your goals, side effects, symptoms, and concerns so that you can work together to make you as comfortable as possible. Some side effects that can be treated with palliative care are: anemia, anxiety, constipation, depression, fatigue, insomnia, nausea, neuropathy, pain, and vomiting.

Where is palliative care given? Depending on the type of treatment, palliative care can be given at home, in the hospital, or at a clinic. Check with your insurance company to see what options are available for you.

Why is palliative care important? Palliative care takes into account everything you may be feeling when dealing with a cancer diagnosis. It does not focus solely on your diagnosis but on who you are as a person, what your values and goals are. It can help guide quality treatment while making you as comfortable as possible.

How do I start to talk to my medical team about my palliative care choices and what is right for me? An important part of palliative care is talking about your diagnosis, treatment, and needs. These conversations help everyone understand what you want and expect from your treatments and overall care. Palliative care works best when you, your family, and your health care team work together.

Here are some tips for talking with your health care team:

- Ask the doctor to explain your diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis. These might change with time, so keep asking questions. You may find it helpful to take notes at your appointments or bring someone along to help you remember things.
- Ask your health care team to explain anything you do not understand. This can be a medical word, a treatment, etc.

- Ask questions about your social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs.
- Tell your health care team about any pain, discomfort, or other side effects. Do this even if you think they are not serious, or if you are afraid that the cancer is getting worse. Telling your doctor about your symptoms helps them find the best options for managing those symptoms more quickly. Today, there are many ways to relieve symptoms.
- Write down any symptoms and side effects you have, including what happens, how often, the time of day when it happens, and how bad it is. Share your notes with your doctor or nurse. This tracking helps your health care team find the cause of the problem and treat it.
- Talk with your doctor about the palliative care services that are available to you. You may also ask to see a doctor who specializes in palliative care and pain management.

As a woman living with breast or ovarian cancer, palliative care may be helpful throughout your experience. To benefit most, be proactive about asking your health care team for help with symptom management or other issues related to palliative care. For additional questions about palliative care and how you can best advocate for yourself, contact Sharsheret at clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org or 866.474.2774.

www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/types/recur_metast/stop_treat/palliative
www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/physical-emotional-and-social-effects-cancer/what-palliative-care
blog.komen.org/blog/komen-perspectives-palliative-care-for-breast-cancer-important-and-often-underused/