



## Supportive Oncology

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

**WHAT** is supportive oncology? Supportive oncology, also known as palliative care, is a comprehensive approach to care that focuses on enhancing quality of life after a cancer diagnosis. It addresses not only physical symptoms but also emotional, mental, spiritual, and practical needs. This holistic model prioritizes your comfort, supports personal choice, and aims to help you feel better overall.

**WHO** is supportive oncology for? Supportive oncology is for anyone affected by cancer or a serious illness who is experiencing a reduced quality of life. 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. Your care team may include an oncologist, specialized nurses, social workers or psychologists, and chaplains for spiritual support. Treatment options can vary widely, from medications and dietary changes to relaxation techniques and family therapy. The goal is personalized, compassionate care that meets your unique needs.

**WHEN** is supportive oncology right for me? Supportive oncology can be valuable at any point in your cancer journey, especially when facing tough decisions about treatment or navigating emotional, physical, or spiritual challenges. This care can help you focus on what matters most, like spending quality time with loved ones, practicing mindfulness or meditation, engaging in art therapy or prayer. Supportive oncology also helps with managing physical symptoms like fatigue, anxiety, nausea, or pain. When you're ready, speak with your supportive care team about your goals, side effects, and concerns so you can work together to improve your daily well-being.

**WHERE** can you receive supportive oncology? Supportive oncology services are flexible and can be provided in a variety of settings: at home, in hospitals, in outpatient clinics, or even virtually through telehealth. Your care team will work with you to deliver support wherever and whenever you need it most.

**WHY** is supportive oncology so important? A cancer diagnosis affects more than your body. It can impact your emotional and spiritual well-being, your relationships, and your daily life. Supportive oncology addresses these wide-ranging needs with empathy and compassion. By treating the whole person, this care empowers you and your loved ones to face challenges with strength and clarity, no matter where you are on your journey. It helps you live more comfortably and meaningfully on your terms.

**HOW** do I start to talk to my medical team about my care choices and what is right for me? Talking openly with your medical team about your care preferences is a key part of supportive oncology. These conversations help ensure your treatment aligns with your goals and values.

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

- Ask your doctor to clearly explain your diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis. These may change over time. Keep the conversation going.
- Don't hesitate to ask about anything you don't understand, including medical terms or procedures.
- Discuss your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs.
- Always report symptoms or side effects, even if they seem minor or if you're concerned they might mean the cancer is progressing.
- Tracking your symptoms (what happens, when, and how severe it is) can help your team tailor care more effectively.
- Ask about supportive oncology services available to you. You may also request a referral to a palliative care or symptom management specialist.

As a woman living with breast or ovarian cancer, supportive oncology can be a vital part of your care from diagnosis onward. The more proactive you are in communicating your needs, the more your team can help.

For more information or support, contact Sharsheret's clinical staff at **[clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org](mailto:clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org)** or call **866.474.2774**.

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Information for this document was compiled from the following sources: [breastcancer.org](https://www.breastcancer.org), [cancer.net](https://www.cancer.net), and [komen.org](https://www.komen.org)

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