

# Changes to Self-Image: A Guide for Gynecological Cancer Survivors

## What do you need to know about self-image?

After cancer, you may feel different and have a different relationship with your body, both in how you believe you appear to others and how your body functions.

Some survivors may feel empty or incomplete because parts of their reproductive organs have been removed as part of their cancer treatment. Others may experience changes in their femininity or gender expression, their self-worth, or their relationship with their partner.

It is important to be aware of some strategies that can help you manage changes to your self-image on your cancer recovery journey.

## Things that may affect your self-image

Here are some of the post-treatment effects that gynecological cancer survivors may experience. Please note, this list is for information only. You may or may not experience these issues.

- Loss of fertility
- Hair loss
- Weight gain/loss
- Scarring
- Skin changes (such as redness or sensitivity)
- Changes to or loss of reproductive organs
- Physical changes (such as loss of balance, muscle weakness or other changes)

## How to access support:

- Contact your healthcare team. Your healthcare team can evaluate your needs and provide a referral to other professionals who can help.
- Talk to a registered nurse or find health services using [Health811](#) (formerly Telehealth). You can call 811 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007) or use the [online chat](#).
- Find services in your area with the Canadian Cancer Society's [Community Services Locator](#).

## Other things you can do

### Complete a self-assessment

It can be challenging to identify whether you are experiencing changes to your self-image. Doing a self-assessment may help you identify concerns.

- Think about your body image and your sense of self before cancer treatment and now:
  - Have these changed?
  - Have they changed in a positive or negative way?
  - Are any changes impacting the way you feel or the way you live your life?

### Try psychotherapy

- Cognitive behavioural therapy can help you understand why you see yourself the way you do and help you find new ways to think about yourself. Participating in this type of therapy may help improve your sense of body image and how you feel about your body.
- Psychosexual therapy is specific counselling that can help you address sexual concerns with your partner. It may also improve your perception of your body image and sexual satisfaction.

### Add physical activity to your day.

Participating in exercise programs (such as gym classes, running) may contribute to feeling healthy and improve your self-confidence.

## More information

Here are some more resources that you may find helpful:

- [Life After Primary Gynecological Cancer Treatment: A Guide for Survivors and Caregivers](#) by Queen's University School of Nursing can help you prepare for life after gynecological cancer treatment. It provides information for people who are recovering from cancer and care partners. (Information and resources on self-image can be found on pg. 26-29 and on pg. 46)
- Canadian Cancer Society provides [information and helpful tips](#) on coping with body image issues and self-esteem challenges.
- [Managing Body Image Concerns after Cancer Treatment](#) by University Health Network provides information on how to manage body image concerns after cancer treatment.

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