

Have you been diagnosed and are living with colorectal cancer? Our organisation is here to give you expert support.

talk to us, we've been there.

## Digestive Cancers Europe

www.digestivecancers.eu  
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I can tell you how to start running again, one foot after the other.



**DIGESTIVE CANCERS EUROPE**



## I have been diagnosed with colorectal cancer. What do I do now?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- You have been diagnosed with colorectal cancer (CRC). This is probably the most difficult news you have ever had to deal with. You may feel confused and scared and you may have a lot of questions.
- You may hear or read what your chances of survival are. Do not be discouraged by this. Remember that these are based on statistics: no two patients are alike and what may apply to one person may not apply to another.
- It is important to be well-informed about your disease and your treatment.

- You are not alone in dealing with your disease. Your healthcare team at the hospital, your family doctor, your caregiver, family and friends will support you.
- You will be provided with the contact details of a person or a team you can contact about any questions or concerns you may have between consultations. If not, request this number/contact from your clinician.
- Write down all your questions, and if you are worried about something, contact the designated contact person at your hospital.
- Consider contacting a patient organisation and see which information and services they can offer you.
- On the internet, you will find a lot of information. Make sure that the information is reliable and based on medical research.
- The hospital and local patient organisations can help you with reliable information about the disease and treatment options either in the form of printed or online materials.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## When and how do I tell my loved ones that I have cancer and need treatment?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- Telling your loved ones that you have cancer is a difficult and emotional moment. The sooner you share the news with a person you trust, the easier it will become to talk about your disease to others.
- During or after your treatment, you may need additional support.

- When communicating about your disease, it may be hard but try to stay open and create a relationship of trust with your family and friends.
- It is important to feel supported. Your partner, a relative and/or a close friend can help you at home or go with you to your consultations. A trusted person can also help your communication with your physician or nurse.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## What are my treatment options?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- Your healthcare team will inform you about your treatment options, explain the benefits, side-effects, consequences and why they recommend a particular treatment for you.
- It is important that you fully understand all this, and that the healthcare team also listens to your expectations and wishes and answers all your questions clearly.
- You should have a relationship of trust with your healthcare team, and you are always entitled to a second opinion.

- Remember you can always ask questions about anything you do not understand or that seems unclear.
- It is also important to understand your role in the treatment plan: good nutrition, physical activity, adherence to medicines and reporting of unexpected events are key factors to increase the effectiveness of the treatment and the speed of your recovery. Indeed, you have an active role to play too.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## How much will my body change?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- As a result of your disease and treatment, you may experience changes to your body, both in the short and long term. Some patients may need a stoma (temporary or permanent) after surgery. Your treatment may lead to weight loss, hair loss, fatigue, nausea and impact your fertility. You may also experience incontinence and sexual dysfunction.

- Communicate to your healthcare team all your symptoms and any physical or emotional changes you worry about. They can refer you to other specialists, such as a physiotherapist or a psycho-oncologist, who can help you cope with some of the physical and emotional changes you are facing.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## My physical and emotional well-being

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- Your disease and your treatment may affect your emotional state. That is normal, but it is also important to seek help when anxiety or feelings of depression persist. Physical activity and exercise have a positive impact on your recovery and response to treatment.

- Talk to your healthcare team and ask the support of a psycho-oncologist. It may also help you to talk to other patients from a patient organisation.
- Incorporate an exercise routine in your daily life. Be gradually active; for example, you may start going for short walks at first, which you can expand with time; plan your activities: e.g. be active in the morning and rest in the afternoon. Remember to discuss this with your healthcare team.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## What can I eat?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- Good nutrition is crucial during your treatment. The effectiveness of your treatment and your recovery depend on it.
- During and after treatment certain foods should be avoided.

- Keep an eye on your weight. Before it drops by more than 5%, consult an oncology nutritionist or dietician who can give you a special diet.
- Ask your healthcare team for advice on what you should eat and what to avoid.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## Can I still go to work?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- If you are actively working, you will need to take time off for and after surgery and during chemotherapy. This can be for the entire period, or at times when you feel weak.
- If you have health insurance, this may cover disease-related income loss.

- If you are employed, informing your line manager/ boss or human resources department early on can help you with practical issues, e.g., taking time off for your treatment, return to work etc.
- It is also important that you discuss your return to work after your illness.
- Contact your insurance company to fully understand the financial consequences of your disease, but also all the services that may be covered (e.g., reimbursement of transport to the hospital).

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## What about my daily life?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- It is important to nourish social interaction. On moments that you feel well, go for walks with friends or invite them over.
- Because chemotherapy reduces your immune system, you should avoid mass meetings in closed areas to avoid infections. This is even more important during epidemic periods (flu, corona, ...)
- Discuss travel plans with your healthcare team. It is important to avoid complications when you are not close to a healthcare centre.

- Not everyone needs to know about what you are going through but do not let embarrassment get in the way. Keep active and social whenever you can. This will positively impact your life and your mental health.
- Before travelling, make sure you take out a travel insurance that covers patients with cancer.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## Where can I get support?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- You may wish to discuss what you are going through with other people who have experience with the disease.
- A patient organisation can bring you in contact with other patients who can share practical tips or give you emotional support.
- They also have trained staff and volunteers who can provide you with unbiased, up-to-date and easy to understand information about different aspects of your disease.

- Consider finding your nearest patient organisation. They can support you at different stages or with several aspects of your disease.
- They can also provide support for your carers and loved ones.
- In addition, a patient organisation may also refer you to experts to help you deal with issues around your physical and mental well-being, professional, financial, social or other issues.

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT



## What are my rights as a colorectal cancer patient?

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- All cancer patients have basic rights, and no patient should face discrimination in any aspect of their life!

- The European Code of Cancer Practice clearly identifies 10 key rights for cancer patients:

1. Equal access
2. Information
3. Quality, expertise & outcomes
4. Specialised multidisciplinary care
5. Shared decision-making
6. Research & innovation
7. Quality of life
8. Integrated supportive palliative care
9. Survivorship & rehabilitation
10. Reintegration

[www.europecancer.org](http://www.europecancer.org)

WHAT TO DO & WHO TO CONTACT