

Patient information

After treatment for bowel cancer

After your treatment has finished, you will continue to have check-ups with your Colorectal Consultant. This will involve blood tests, CT scans and colonoscopies. Initially you will have an annual CT scan for two years. If you had a colonoscopy before surgery this will be repeated in two years. However, you will have a colonoscopy within a year of your surgery if it wasn't done before your operation. These investigations will continue for several years but they will become less frequent.

If you have any problems or notice any new symptoms between your appointments eg:

- Blood in or on the stools
- Change in bowel habit (unusual or prolonged constipation or diarrhoea)
- Abdominal pains
- Unexplained weight loss

Contact your own GP, the colorectal specialist nurse on 01284 712697, or oncology specialist nurses on: 01284 713212.

Physical effects after cancer treatment

- **Fatigue:** Most people feel very tired after radiotherapy or chemotherapy. This can continue for some months after treatment and sometimes longer. There are different ways of coping with fatigue. Be realistic about what you can do and plan your day to enable you to rest and do the things you want to do. Gentle exercise can also help reduce fatigue.
- **Peripheral neuropathy:** Some chemotherapy drugs can damage the nerves. This can cause pins and needles, burning and muscle weakness. In most people, symptoms gradually improve once treatment has stopped but this can

take several months. For some people this may be permanent, however many people find their symptoms become less over time as they learn to adapt and cope with the changes.

- **Eating difficulties:** You may have lost, or gained, weight as a result of your treatment. Surgery to the bowel or stomach may result in you having to avoid some foods. If you are having difficulty eating or your appetite is low ask your specialist nurse to refer you to a dietician for advice.
- **Psychological and self-help therapies:** There are several psychological and self-help approaches that may help you to cope with the emotional effects of cancer. If you feel you need some extra support contact your GP who may refer you for counselling free of charge on the NHS. Counselling is also available in the Macmillan Unit, please contact the Macmillan Information Centre on 01284 713023. This service is for patients only and is available by appointments on Friday afternoons.

Some people find local support groups useful; to contact the West Suffolk, Thetford and Sudbury Cancer Support Group ring:

- John Place on Bury St Edmunds 01284 766706
- Marion Bedster on Thetford 01842 763734

Email: cancer@cancerselfhelp.org.uk

Healthy lifestyle

- **Eating well:** Eating a balanced diet and keeping to a healthy weight will help you recover more quickly and increase your energy. It can also help to reduce the risk of new cancers, heart disease, strokes and diabetes.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise after treatment improves your fitness and helps you recover. It can help reduce depression and anxiety by encouraging the release of body endorphins (chemicals). Research has shown that exercise can reduce the risk of some cancers such as breast, bowel and womb. For more information on eating well and exercise contact:

onelifesuffolk.co.uk or call 01473 718193 or

macmillan.org.uk or call free on 0808 808 0000 (Monday – Friday 9.00 am – 8.00 pm)

- **Work:** When you plan to go back to work arrange a meeting with your employer or human resources adviser. You can discuss either a phased return to work or you may need to discuss reducing your hours or changing your job description.
- **Financial Issues:** There are many organisations which can provide financial support and advice. To contact the Macmillan Benefits Advice Service telephone 01473 264848 or email macmillanbenefitadviceservice@suffolk.gov.uk

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the hospital website www.wsh.nhs.uk and click on the link, or visit the disabledgo website:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>