

Heart

The health of your heart after childhood cancer treatment

Background

Certain drugs and radiotherapy (radiation) to the chest may have effects on your heart after treatment is finished. Damage may affect the heart muscle, the coronary arteries supplying the heart, the pericardium (lining of the heart), the system that controls heart rhythm and the heart valves. However, it is important to remember that most people who receive these treatments do not develop problems with their heart. As the effects may not appear for many years, we would advise you to have a healthy lifestyle to prevent further damage and your clinical team will advise on types of tests you may need in order to monitor your heart health.

Who is at risk?

The common treatments used to treat cancer in young people that are known to damage the heart include:

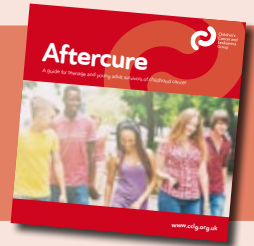
- Chemotherapy drugs:
 - doxorubicin
 - daunorubicin
 - epirubicin
 - idarubicin
 - mitozantrone
 - high dose cyclophosphamide
- Radiotherapy to the chest including radiotherapy to the mantle (from the chin to the upper abdomen), mediastinum (central part of the chest), lung, whole or upper abdomen, left kidney region (left upper abdomen or left flank), thoracic spine or total body irradiation (TBI).

Other factors may also increase the risk of heart problems after chemotherapy or radiation therapy. These include:

- smoking
- being overweight or obese
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol or lipids in the blood
- eating a diet high in fat
- diabetes
- family history of heart problems
- having an inactive (sedentary) lifestyle

Published in conjunction with Aftercure: A guide for teenage and young adult survivors of childhood cancer

www.aftercure.org





How are heart problems screened for?

In order to check your heart, a routine test is performed. This is usually an echocardiogram (ultrasound) although other tests may be needed. These tests will be done at intervals depending on a number of factors including your previous treatments, general health and lifestyle. If any sign of heart damage is identified you may be referred on to a heart specialist for further tests.

How will I know if I have heart damage?

Some people have no symptoms, even when their heart has been affected by their cancer treatment, it is therefore important that you attend for regular monitoring. Symptoms caused by heart problems include:

- chest pain
- irregular heartbeat
- dizziness or fainting
- shortness of breath when resting or unexpectedly during exercise
- increased tiredness or fatigue
- swelling of the ankles

If you get symptoms like this you must see your doctor and let your clinical team know.

What can I do to keep my heart healthy?

- **Regular exercise** is good for you. However, if you are at higher risk of heart damage (see above), it is important to check with your clinical team before you start any high intensity exercise (e.g. body building, rock climbing and wind surfing) as it may be advisable to see a cardiologist first.
- **Pregnancy** may be a time of extra stress on the heart. If you are considering becoming pregnant, or are already pregnant, make sure your maternity doctors know what treatment you had received. You will need regular ultrasounds of your heart (echocardiograms) during pregnancy and perhaps special monitoring during labour. If you are thinking of having a family please discuss this at an early stage with your clinical team.
- **Smoking** increases the risks of heart disease (as well as cancer). Therefore **DON'T** smoke.
- Having a **healthy, balanced diet** which is low in fat and salt but high in fibre will help to keep your heart healthy.
- **Recreational drug use** can increase the risks to your heart and should be avoided.
- Maintain a **healthy weight** and **blood pressure**.
- Avoid excess **alcohol** intake, especially binge drinking.
- Visit your **dentist** regularly.

Where can I find out more information?

The British Heart Foundation

www.bhf.org.uk/heart-health/preventing-heart-disease

www.aftercure.org

The full range of factsheets for childhood and teenage cancer survivors are available on the Aftercure website in conjunction with CCLG's booklet entitled 'Aftercure: A guide for teenage and young adults survivors of childhood cancer'.

Remember, if you have any worries or concerns speak to your late-effects team or family doctor.



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Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group is a leading children's cancer charity and the UK and Ireland's professional association for those involved in the treatment and care of children with cancer. Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed. Two out of ten children will not survive their disease.

We bring together childhood cancer professionals to ensure all children receive the best possible treatment and care. We fund and support research into childhood cancers, and we help young patients and their families with our expert, high quality and award-winning information resources.

If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us.

CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website.

