

# For Creative Minds

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## Understanding Cancer

### Cancer Cells

Whether you are a person or a puppy, your body is made up of trillions of tiny cells, the body's building blocks. Sometimes, a few cells take on the wrong shape or size and grow out of control. These abnormal cells are known as cancer.

### Who Gets Cancer?

Cancer is common in older people (and dogs), but it is not common in children. It's normal for kids with cancer to wonder, "Why me?" No one knows why some kids get cancer, but one thing is certain—it is not because the child did anything wrong.

### Chemotherapy (Chemo)

Chemotherapy is a medicine that targets and kills those misbehaving cancer cells. It is usually given through a clear tube called an IV. Chemo sometimes hurts healthy cells, too. This can make patients feel sick to their stomach or lose their hair.

### Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy uses high-energy rays (like strong X-rays) to target and kill the cancer cells. Like chemo, it can sometimes make patients feel worse before they get better. Radiation therapy may be used to treat cancer by itself or along with other treatments, like chemo.

### Cancer Research

Medical researchers are doctors who find and test new medications. Thanks to their efforts, cancer treatments are becoming tougher on cancer and easier on the patient. Many groups hold walk-a-thons and other events to raise money for this research.

## Cancer True or False

Do you think the following statements are true or false? Answers are upside down on the bottom of the page.

1 You cannot catch cancer from another child, no matter how much you play together.

2 People who need chemotherapy will lose their hair forever.

3 Animals that live in the ocean do not get cancer.

4 Most children with cancer will get better.

5 When dogs get chemotherapy, they lose their fur.



1. TRUE. Cancer is not like a cold or flu. It does not spread from one person to another.  
2. FALSE. Chemotherapy can damage the cells that make hair grow. These cells get better when treatment is over, and hair starts to grow again. Children who lose their hair may choose to wear a hat, wig or bandana until it grows back.  
3. FALSE. Sea lions, beluga whales, and green sea turtles get cancer. Sharks get cancer too, but not very often.  
4. TRUE. Treatments for cancer may not be any fun, but they work. Most children get better and go on to have normal lives.  
5. FALSE. A dog's fur grows differently than a person's hair. Most breeds do not lose their fur during chemotherapy (with the exception of poodles and some kinds of terriers). Unfortunately, most people do lose hair during chemo treatments.

## Coping with Cancer & Chemo

Children with cancer not only have to deal with being sick, but they also have to cope with some pretty tough treatments. Chemotherapy means sitting in a hospital room for hours, missing school, sports, dance or other hobbies. It can also make kids feel tired and crummy. Here are a few things that can help:

The body needs its strength during chemo, so be sure to eat nutritious foods. If you don't feel like eating, try breaking up meals into small high-protein, high-calorie snacks (like peanut butter, cheese, or yogurt) throughout the day.



Keeping up with homework is important during cancer treatment. It's a reminder that there is life beyond cancer. Doing homework can provide a sense of accomplishment and make it easier to start school again when the time is right.

Tell close family members how you feel about cancer and chemotherapy. It's normal to feel angry, frustrated, sad, or scared. Child Life Specialists are people who help children and their families deal with a serious medical illness. They can share tips for coping with the challenges that many young cancer patients experience.

Take favorite books, books on CD, movies, video games or magazines with you to chemotherapy. Doing an activity you enjoy will take your mind off the treatment and pass the time more quickly.

When you're feeling well enough, invite friends to visit you. Spending time with friends can help life feel normal again.



## Preventing Cancer When You Grow Up

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No one knows how to prevent childhood cancer, but there are ways to try to protect against cancer when you grow up. While anyone can get cancer, people with a healthy lifestyle are less likely to get it as they get older. This lifestyle includes eating healthy foods, watching your weight, and getting plenty of exercise. Children who make healthy choices are more likely to have healthy habits when they grow up.



Eat lots of brightly colored fruits and vegetables, especially those that are high in antioxidants: berries, broccoli, tomatoes, red grapes, spinach, carrots, oranges, cherries, beets, red bell peppers.



Eat more whole-grains: whole-wheat bread instead of white; brown rice and pastas; oatmeal and other whole-grain cereals.



Eat less red meat, such as hamburgers and eat more chicken and fish.

Exercise for about an hour on most days of the week: bike riding, playing games outside, walking, running, and sports of all kinds.

### Find the Healthy Habits

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Look for foods and activities that can be part of a healthy lifestyle. Select the healthy habit from each of the two choices. Then use the first letter of each healthy habit and unscramble the letters to find out what healthy habits make you.

Swimming or  
Watching TV

Eating a Cookie or a  
Tomato

Eating Oatmeal or a  
Donut for breakfast

Eating a Lollipop or a  
Nectarine

Eating Green beans  
or a Brownie

Riding a bike or  
Playing a video game