

Many Childhood Cancer Survivors Are Not Concerned About Health Risks

Survivors and unaffected siblings expressed similar levels of worry about developing cancer in the future.

July 10, 2018 By [Liz Highleyman](#)

People who survived cancer as children are not especially concerned about their future health status, even though their treatment may have put them at higher risk for later health problems, according to [a recent study in Cancer](#), the journal of the American Cancer Society.

Childhood cancer survival has risen as treatments have improved over the years. More than 80 percent of children treated for cancer now survive for five years or more after therapy, according to the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Survivors of childhood cancer have an [elevated risk of various serious chronic health conditions](#), largely related to the long-term effects of chemotherapy and radiation treatment. These may include hormone imbalances, cognitive problems, heart and lung problems, hearing or vision difficulties and development of secondary cancers, as well as depression or other emotional effects.

Little is known, however, about how childhood cancer survivors perceive their future health risk, which could influence whether they receive recommended screenings or take other risk-reduction measures.

“Some of the increased health risks faced by survivors of childhood cancer can be minimized through early detection and intervention, as well as adoption of healthy behaviors,” Todd Gibson, PhD, of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis said in a press release issued by Wiley, the journal’s publisher.

Gibson and colleagues analyzed responses to questionnaires completed by 15,620 adults in the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study and 3,991 adult siblings of survivors who hadn’t had cancer themselves. The median age of the survivors was 26.

The study showed that 31 percent of cancer survivors said they were not concerned about their future health and 40 percent were not worried about developing cancer again. The level of concern about future health was only modestly greater than that of siblings who never had cancer,

and the concern about developing cancer in the future was about the same.

Cancer survivors who had been exposed to high doses of radiation were somewhat more likely to report concern about future health problems or subsequent cancer. But even in this higher-risk group, 24 percent said they were not concerned about their future health status and 35 percent were not concerned about developing cancer.

“Many survivors do not have survivor-focused medical care, so it is important for them to be aware of their health risks and advocate for appropriate guideline-based care. A lack of concern about potential health risks may be a barrier to this self-advocacy and adoption of healthy behaviors,” Gibson said.

However, he added, not all childhood cancer survivors are at high risk for future health problems, “so for some a lack of concern is likely appropriate.”

[Click here](#) to read the study abstract.

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