

# Improving the Mental Health of Cancer Survivors: Adjusting to a “New Normal” After Cancer Treatment with Audio Descriptive Transcript

## Audio Descriptive Text

- Patient-Provider Communication: Improving the Mental Health of Cancer Survivors. National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole speaking.
- Mari Brick introduced.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole continues speaking.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole asking Mari Brick how she feels emotionally and physically when going through cancer treatment.
- Mari Brick discussing her experiences of cancer treatment and asking Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole about post-treatment challenges affecting patients.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole explaining the experiences and side effects during and after treatment.
- Mari Brick asking what providers can do to reduce these adverse effects.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole providing prevention and treatments methods.
- Mari Brick affirming doctors and nurses providing coordinated care to prevent issues.
- Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole affirming doctors and nurses providing coordinated care to prevent issues.
- Last slide showing the following links to the following websites–
  - CDC’s Cancer Prevention and Control at [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer).
  - National Association of Chronic Disease Directors at [www.chronicdisease.org/](http://www.chronicdisease.org/).

## Video Summary

Cancer survivor Mari Brick talks to oncologist Dr. Tonya Echols about what it was like for her to adjust to life after cancer treatment.

## Audio Script

[Music]

[Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole] Hello, I'm Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole, and I'm an oncologist. Today I'm talking to Mari Brick a breast cancer survivor. Once cancer treatment is completed, patients may experience a range of feelings from a sense of relief to anxiety and worry about life after treatment.

Mari is here to talk about what it was like for her to adjust to life after cancer treatment. Mari, how did you feel emotionally and physically after completing cancer treatment, and what was it like for you to adjust to what some patients call your new normal?

[Mari Brick] Well, it took a little bit of adjustment in the beginning. Because looking in the mirror I saw somebody completely different from the person I'd seen for 48 years prior to being diagnosed with cancer.

The other thing is that I felt that my new normal was a lot different from what was normal for me before cancer. I, every time I heard the word cancer or saw the word cancer, I thought about what I had gone through. I thought about my diagnosis, I also thought that I needed to prepare myself for the possibility of reoccurrence somewhere in the future. And so some of the things that I did were to collect research and look online for the newest treatment and the newest studies that came out so that I could share them with my oncologist whenever I saw her and so that I could just keep them by my side in case I needed them ever again.

Some of the other things that were sort of like the new normal for me were although my family was really supportive during my treatment, it seems like after treatment everything sort of went back to the way it was before. And it wasn't like that for me. Because I was always thinking about cancer I was always thinking about what I needed to do to prevent cancer. And I don't know if my family was really thinking about you know what I had gone through. We don't really talk much about it so I'm not quite sure if they think about it as much as I do. But that's something that you know I often wonder.

Some of the other differences are that as part of my experience, I'm different physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I've come to really appreciate some of the smaller things in life and then just have a simple gratitude for being present in the everyday moment.

[Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole] Wow. Your new normal has really changed.

[Mari Brick] Dr. Cole, I have a question for you. How have you seen post-treatment challenges affect your patience and what can we do to make sure that we get the support we need when treatment is over?

[Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole] Well first of all, it's important for survivors both before during and after treatment to let your physicians or healthcare providers know what emotional concerns or needs that you have. That way you are plugged into the system from the beginning and you can have that support throughout your entire treatment course.

It's common for cancer survivors to have fear to experience fear especially during treatment. You always have that fear of, you know, am I going to have some side effects from treatment? Am I going to die of my cancer? And then after treatment is common for patients to feel like you know is my cancer going to come back? And you always want to make sure that you address those concerns for a patient but we don't know unless you tell us.

So things that you can do, you can always optimize your health by you know improving your diet, a healthy diet, exercise, doing the appropriate follow-up care with all of your physician team, because many survivors have more than one physician that they are following with and it's important for you to follow up with each physician.

The last thing that I see patients struggle with our side effects from treatment. If you have got say lymphedema or you are having chronic pain as a result of scarring or a side effect from your treatment, you have to really talk with your physician about ways that you can continue your normal routine but adapt to the changes you need to make for those side effects and get the appropriate treatments that are available to help you manage the side effects more effectively.

[Mari Brick] That's really good to know. And so what can providers do?

[Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole] Well, providers can provide mental health screenings and refer for appropriate to clinical or community settings for counseling and support. They can also make sure or teach survivors about nutrition, proper exercise, getting enough sleep reducing high risk behaviors such as smoking and excess drinking. They can also make sure that they are getting the appropriate screens for say Pap smears or colonoscopies.

[Mari Brick] It's really good information for me to hear, thank you.

Doctors and nurses have a real opportunity to reduce the impact of problems like these and help cancer survivors like me live happy, healthier lives.

[Dr. Tanya Echols-Cole] Doctors and nurses need to work with patients to address the possible long-term and late psychosocial effects of cancer diagnosis and treatment. Provide coordinate care and promote healthy

behaviors. Conducting recommended distress screening and urging cancer survivors to receive treatment for psychosocial and neurocognitive concerns when indicated is an important part of their care.

For access to healthcare provider training and resources and information about the topics discussed, please visit [cdc.gov/cancerandchronicdisease](https://cdc.gov/cancerandchronicdisease) dot org.