

Psychological & Social Impact of Childhood Cancer

Stress & behavioural changes in children Treatments can impact on the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of the children. They may experience mood swings or confusion about their diagnosis and their parents' reactions. It is important to spend time listening to children and trying to understand their feelings to help them cope.

Disruption to School Children have to stop school temporarily until their doctor gives the go-ahead. Parents need to consider positive ways to engage and occupy the children. It is useful to inform the school of the children's conditions, maintain contact periodically and work with the schools to help with their re-integration after treatment.

Anxiety over long-term effects of illness & treatment Some treatments may have long-term side effects on the children, and more information can be obtained from the doctors.

Impact on siblings Siblings of the sick children may feel neglected as attention is focussed on the children with cancer. Involve siblings by explaining to them what is happening and discuss questions and concerns that they may have.

Coping with marital strain & employment issues Couples may experience strain and tension due to the stress of taking care of a sick child and having less time together. Stress may also take the form of employers not understanding the situation. It is helpful for couples to communicate their worries and feelings and work out solutions together. Support systems like extended family members can be tapped upon to help care for children so that parents can rest.



About The Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF)

The Children's Cancer Foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to improve the quality of lives of children with cancer and their families through enhancing their emotional, social and medical well-being.

For a full list of our support services and programmes, visit us at www.ccf.org.sg

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**Children's
Cancer
Foundation**

Childhood Cancer Be Informed



**Building a Community of Support for
Children with Cancer and their Families**

What is cancer? Cancer occurs when body cells grow in an abnormal and uncontrolled manner, disrupting normal bodily functions. These cells often travel to other parts of the body, growing and replacing normal tissue.

Myth : Cancer is contagious and can spread like flu.

Fact : Cancer is not contagious.

Cancer cannot be spread from one child to another. However, children on treatment are often discouraged to go to crowded places as their immunity is low and are vulnerable to infections. They sometimes wear face masks to avoid being infected by other illness.

Myth : Childhood cancers are inherited.

Fact : There is no known cause for most childhood cancers.

At least 95% of the cancers in children occur spontaneously. Since the triggers of most childhood cancers are unknown, preventive measures are limited. Thus far, studies suggest that there is nothing a child or parent did to induce cancer, and therefore, should avoid doing in order to prevent childhood cancer.

Myth : Childhood cancer = death sentence.

Fact : Most childhood cancers are curable.

For example, in Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia, which is a common form of Leukaemia in Singapore, 3 in 4 children will be cured with chemotherapy alone. A successful cure depends on receiving the current-day standard therapy, a positive attitude and determination to overcome cancer.

Myth : Children with cancer lose all reasons for living.

Fact : Children with cancer can still lead a normal childhood.

Children with cancer can lead a normal childhood. Many children return to normal school life after treatment. In other cases, the children and their families adapt and modify their lifestyle to achieve normalcy. This becomes much easier with care, understanding and support from family, teachers, friends and the community at large.

Myth : All tumours are cancerous.

Fact : Not all tumours are cancerous.

Tumours are either benign or malignant. Malignant tumours are cancerous cells that invade and spread to other parts of the body. In contrast, benign tumours invade tissues surrounding it and generally do not spread.

Unfortunately the fast growing tissues of children allow cancers to grow more rapidly. Children are also more susceptible to certain cancers like leukaemia, brain tumours and lymphoma. Currently the causes of most childhood cancers remain largely unknown

Common Types Of Childhood Cancers

There are more than 100 different types of childhood cancers that can happen in different parts of the body. The most common type in Singapore is Leukaemia.

Leukaemia

Cancer of the blood; where white blood cells grow abnormally and invade other tissues and organs via the bloodstream. These white blood cells crowd out and slow the production of healthy blood cells.

Symptoms

- Paleness
- Lethargy
- Prolonged fevers
- Easy bruising
- Listless behaviour
- Poor concentration
- Weight loss
- Bone aches/pains

Brain Tumours

The most common solid tumours in children. Formed when cells in the brain or nervous system start growing abnormally and clump together to form a tumour, which then disrupts the normal brain functions.

Symptoms

- Headache
- Poor appetite, weight loss
- Vomiting
- Visual disturbances
- Sudden change in handwriting
- Sudden loss in bladder and bowel control
- Fits or seizures

Lymphoma

Cancer of the lymph glands.

Two main varieties of Lymphoma: Hodgkin's and Non-Hodgkin's, the later being more common in children.

Symptoms

- Abdominal mass leading to nausea, vomiting and pain
- Painless jaw swelling
- Chest mass causing breathing problems

Modes of Treatment

Chemotherapy

Anti-cancer drugs which destroy cancer cells by entering the bloodstream and stopping cancerous cells from growing and multiplying throughout the body.

Radiotherapy

The use of radiation, for instance, an extremely high dose of X-ray, to kill cancer cells in a specific place. Radiotherapy also kills healthy cells alongside of cancerous cells.

Stem Cell (Blood or Marrow) and Cord Blood Transplant

When the patient is not responding to conventional forms of treatment, they need to undergo Stem Cell or Cord Blood Transplant.

Common Side Effects of Treatment

- Hair loss
- Changes in appetite
- Susceptibility to infection
- Nausea and vomiting

