

# Years after diagnosis, many young cancer survivors continue to struggle socially

March 20 2017

---

A new study indicates that the social difficulties faced by many adolescent and young adult cancer survivors often persist for years after their diagnosis. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study indicates that though these patients may see some improvement in their social lives during the first year following diagnosis, their social functioning tends to remain constant after that, leaving them socially impaired relative to their cancer-free peers.

Adolescence and young adulthood is a challenging period of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development, and a [cancer diagnosis](#) and its treatment can compound these challenges for young patients. Many studies have found that adolescents and young adults with cancer experience greater challenges in social functioning compared with cancer-free peers or older cancer patients, but few studies have examined this phenomenon by following the same patients over time.

To prospectively examine changes in social functioning among adolescents and [young adults](#) in the first two years after a cancer diagnosis, Olga Husson, PhD, of the Radboud University Medical Center in The Netherlands, and her colleagues asked patients at five US medical institutions to complete a survey around the time of diagnosis and again at 12 and 24 months later. The study included 141 cancer patients aged 14 to 39 years at the time of diagnosis.

At all timepoints studied, social functioning for patients was worse when

compared with population norms. Although it improved somewhat over the first year following diagnosis, social functioning remained significantly lower compared with population norms after 24 months. The authors also examined the different trajectories of social functioning over time, and found that one in three of the cancer survivors reported consistently low social functioning across all timepoints. These [patients](#) were more often not receiving treatment, which may reflect the challenges of transitioning from cancer patient to survivor, including concerns about negative impacts on finances, body image, work goals, relationships, and plans for having children. In addition, survivors scoring consistently low on social functioning reported more physical symptoms and higher levels of psychological distress. They also perceived themselves to receive less social support.

"Reducing physical symptoms and [psychological distress](#) and enhancing [social support](#) by interventions in the period after treatment may potentially help these young survivors to better reintegrate into society," said Dr. Husson.

**More information:** "Cancer in Adolescents and Young Adults: Who Remain at Risk for Poor Social Functioning Over Time?" Olga Husson, Bradley Zebrack, Christine Aguilar, Brandon Hayes-Lattin, and Steve Cole. *Cancer*; Published Online: March 20, 2017. [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.30656](#)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Years after diagnosis, many young cancer survivors continue to struggle socially (2017, March 20) retrieved 4 May 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-03-years-diagnosis-young-cancer-survivors.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.