



Cancer in Children vs Adults

In adults, lifestyle-related factors such as weight, diet, exercise, and habits play a major role in many types of cancer, but usually take many years to influence cancer risk. Childhood cancers do not have a strong environmental link and are often the result of DNA changes in cells that take place very early in life, sometimes even before birth. Childhood cancers often respond better to certain chemotherapy treatments than adults, but children are more likely to be sensitive to radiation therapy than adults.

Treating Childhood Cancer

In the US, children are commonly treated at specialized children's cancer centers. Children treated at pediatric specialty centers have the advantage of being treated by a team of specialists who know the differences between adult and childhood cancers, as well as the unique needs of children and teens with cancer. Ninety percent of these centers are members of the Children's Oncology Group (COG). There are six COG facilities in Virginia (see childrensoncologygroup.org for more information). Clinical trials are available for most cancer types at pediatric cancer treatment centers.

Survivorship, Long-term and Late effects

Survivors of any kind of cancer can develop health problems during or after treatment. The risk for each child varies depending on the type of cancer, type of treatment, age at treatment and other factors. Some of the late effects may include:

- Heart or lung problems (due to certain drugs or radiation therapy to the chest area)
- Slowed or delayed growth and development (in bones or overall)
- Changes in sexual development or the ability to have children
- Learning problems
- Increased risk of other cancers later in life

Children who have had cancer should have regular follow-up care to monitor for long-term or late effects of their cancer treatment. The COG has developed long-term follow-up guidelines for survivors of childhood cancers. A survivorship care plan should be provided by the oncologist for each child who has undergone cancer treatment.

References

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