



Esophageal Cancer Care

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Specialized Doctors and Personalized Care

Learning you have cancer can feel overwhelming. Your life suddenly changes and a cascade of emotions often follows, affecting you and your loved ones. You will likely have many questions as well. Your Kaiser Permanente cancer care team will provide you with the guidance, treatment, and support you need.

This booklet contains information about **esophageal cancer**. It explains what to expect and how your care team will work with you to make your treatment as comfortable and successful as possible.

Your care team includes skilled specialists who perform thousands of cancer treatments

every year. Our advanced equipment and techniques ensure that you receive the most current and highest quality care available.

We welcome your questions and encourage you and your family to talk with your care team about any concerns. We're here to help.



Your Kaiser Permanente Cancer Care Team

A team of physicians and other health professionals will provide you with the best care and treatment possible. Our physicians are specialists from different fields, such as radiology, oncology, and surgery. They work together to create a treatment plan specifically for you.

Your care team will meet with you to:

- Explain the details of your diagnosis.
- Discuss your treatment options.
- Help you make decisions and prepare for treatment.

Having a care team is like getting a second, third, and fourth opinion right from the start.

We hope you'll feel comfortable with all members of your care team. Let us know if you have questions or concerns.



Note to loved ones

Having a family member or friend go through this type of care may affect you too. At Kaiser Permanente, we'll provide you with resources to help.



Physicians may include:

- **Medical Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating cancer with drugs, such as chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy.
- **Radiation Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in the use of radiation to treat cancer.
- **Interventional Radiologist:** A doctor who specializes in image-guided procedures to treat and diagnose diseases, such as CT-guided biopsies of the liver or other organs affected by the spread of esophageal cancer.

Other health care professionals may include:

- **Oncology Nurse:** A nurse who specializes in caring for people who have cancer.
- **Physician's Assistant:** A health professional who practices medicine under the supervision of a physician and is often a member of the esophageal cancer surgery team.
- **Social Worker:** A health professional trained to talk with people and their families about emotional or physical needs, and to find them support services.
- **Registered Dietician:** A health professional with special training in the use of diet and nutrition to keep the body healthy.
- **Patient Care Coordinator or Discharge Planner:** A health professional who coordinates discharge from the hospital and makes sure you have the equipment and care you need at home.

You can use this table to keep track of the names and contact information for your care team so you have it all in one place.

PHYSICIAN	NAME	CONTACT INFORMATION
Primary Care Doctor		
Medical Oncologist		
Radiation Oncologist		
Surgeon		
Medical Center		Daytime: After Hours:
Other		



Your cancer care team may include physicians and other health professionals from different specialties. This team works together to provide the best care for you.

My Doctor Online app

Download our My Doctor Online app for free from the App Store or from Google Play to help you manage your care, including:



- Getting reminders and details of upcoming appointments.
- Emailing your doctor with nonurgent messages.
- Calling our 24/7 Appointment and Advice line.
- Finding maps and directions to Kaiser Permanente medical centers and medical office facilities.

Learning about Esophageal Cancer

Esophageal cancer starts in the hollow tube (esophagus) that connects the throat to the stomach. The esophagus carries the food and liquids you swallow to your stomach.

Cancer develops when normal cells in the esophagus lining change and grow uncontrollably. Over time, a tumor may form inside the lining of your esophagus. The cancer may then grow outward through additional layers of the esophagus.

In some cases, this cancer might spread to:

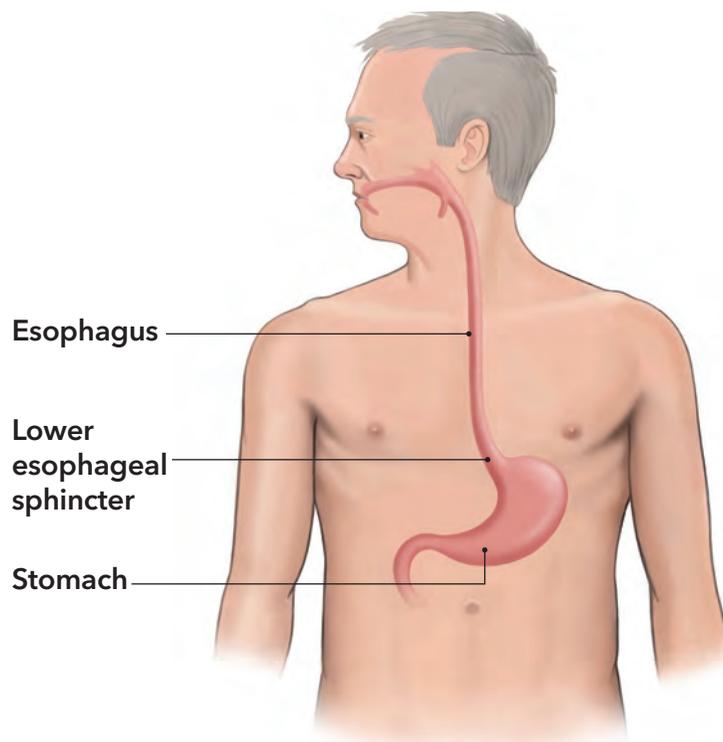
- Blood vessels and lymph nodes in the chest and other nearby organs.
- Other parts of the body (metastatic cancer).

Treatment may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and other methods. You might also need nutritional support.

By understanding what to expect, you can:

- Make informed decisions about your care.
- Become familiar with the tools you need to cope with the disease.

We know a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. We're here to give you the best care possible.



Diagnosing Esophageal Cancer



We use information gathered from diagnostic tests to determine the size and spread of your cancer.

We may recommend tests, such as:

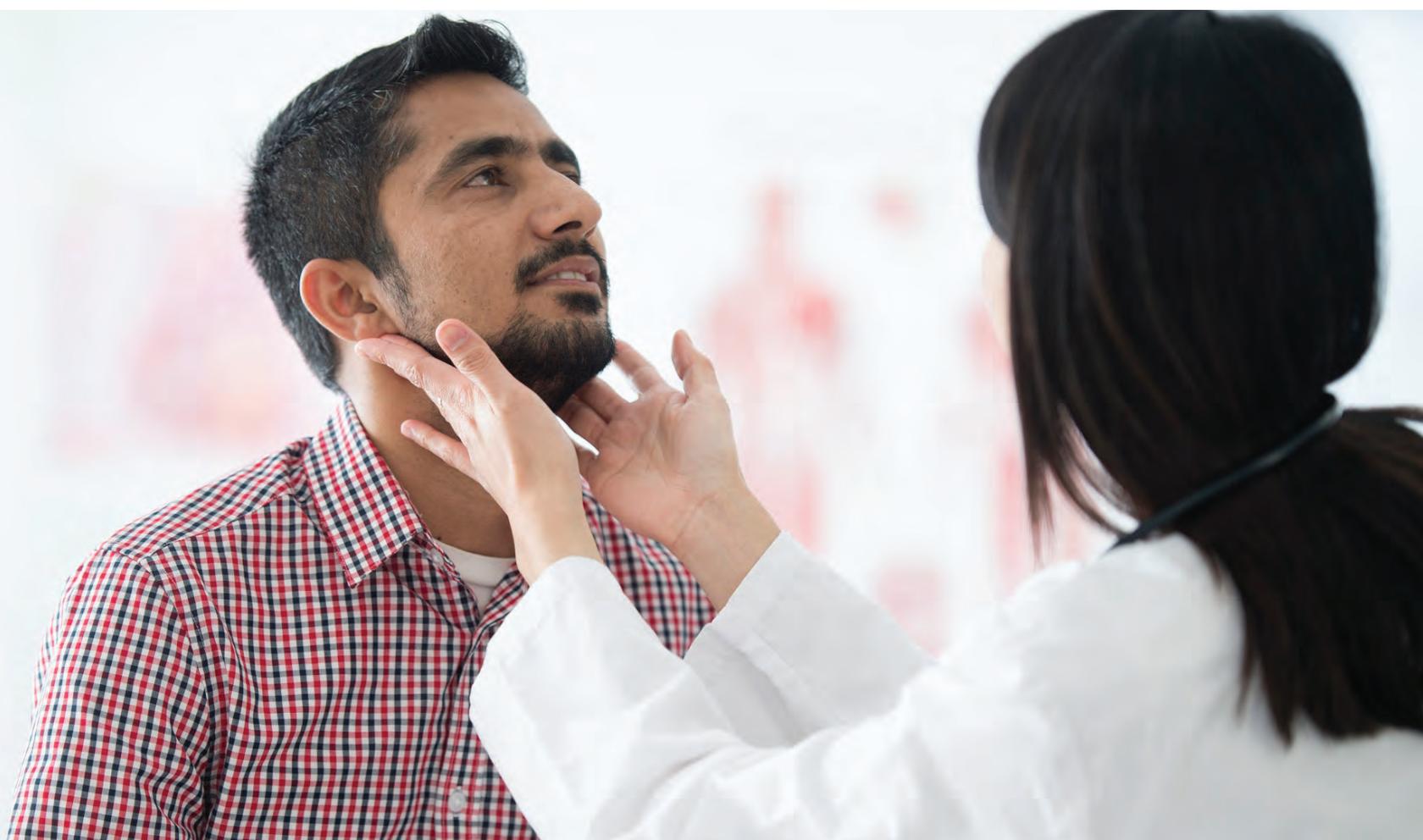
- Barium swallow, to see a tumor on X-ray.
- Upper endoscopy, to remove a sample and evaluate abnormal tissue (biopsy).
- Endoscopic ultrasound, to see the size of a tumor and if it's spread.
- Bronchoscopy, to see if the cancer has spread to your airway.
- Thoracoscopy (VATS) and laparoscopy, to view and biopsy areas around the esophagus to look for cancer spread.
- Imaging scans (such as CT, MRI, PET), to learn how far the cancer has spread.

Staging Esophageal Cancer

The size and spread of cancer is defined by certain stages. Your treatment plan is based on the stage of esophageal cancer.

The stages of esophageal cancer include:

- **Stage 0** The cancer is found only in the top layers of the lining of the esophagus.
- **Stage I** The cancer has spread from the top layer of tissue to the next layer of tissue in the wall of the esophagus.
- **Stage II** The cancer has invaded deeper layers of the wall and possibly nearby lymph nodes.
- **Stage III** The cancer has spread through the outer layer of the esophagus to lymph nodes and possibly nearby tissues and structures, such as the windpipe (trachea).
- **Stage IV** The cancer is found in lymph nodes or other parts of the body away from the esophagus.



Choosing Treatment That's Right for You

Treatment of esophageal cancer depends on the location and spread of the cancer. After we learn everything we can about your cancer, we'll talk about the treatment options and develop a plan that's right for you.

Standard treatment options for esophageal cancer include:

- Surgery
- Endoscopic treatments
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapy

If the tumor makes it difficult or impossible for you to eat, you may:

- Receive nutrients through an intravenous (IV) line or feeding tube until you're able to eat on your own.
- Have a procedure to open the esophagus. For example, we might place a mesh tube (stent) into the narrowed or blocked esophagus to keep it open and allow you to swallow.

Questions to ask your care team

What are my treatment options?

What are the risks and possible side effects of each treatment?

What can I do to prepare for treatment?

Will I need to stay in the hospital? If so, how long?

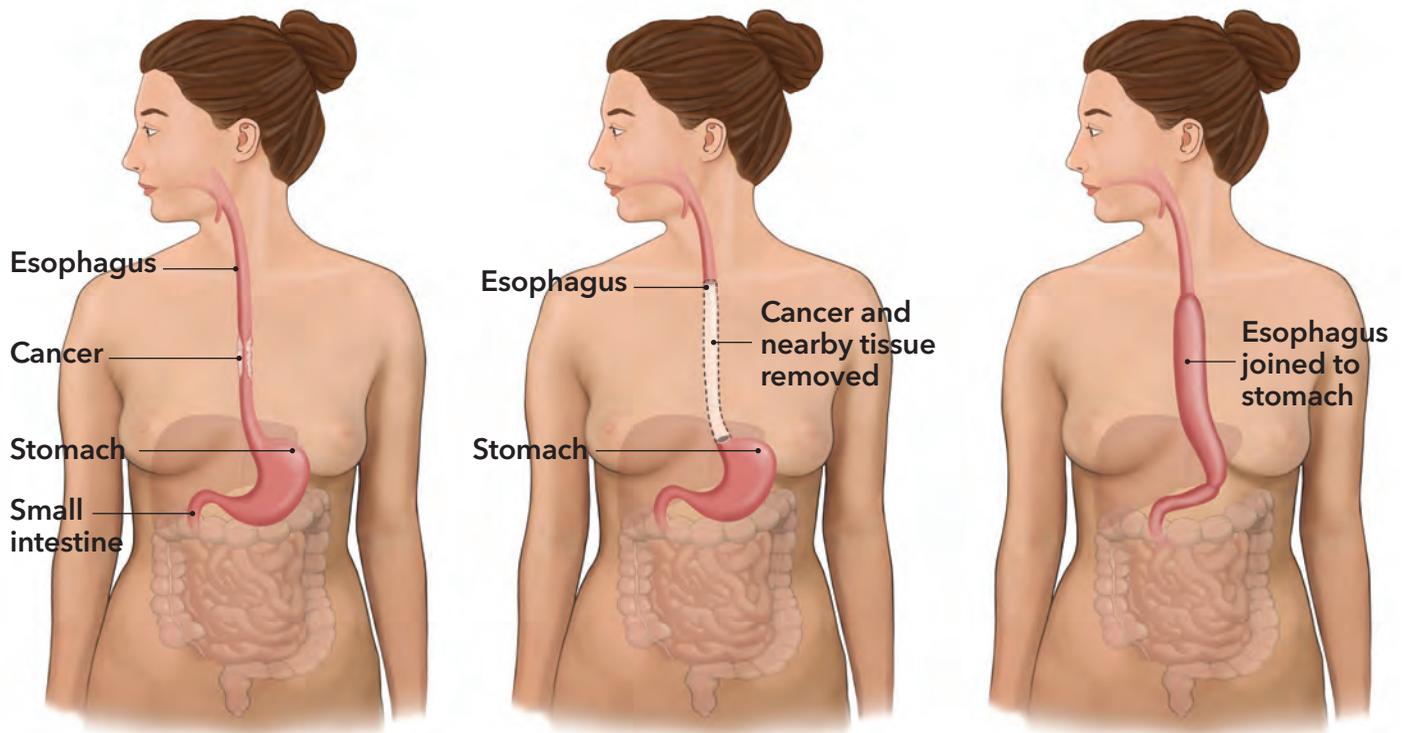
Surgery

Surgery may be the first treatment you receive if you have early stage esophageal cancer. If it's more advanced, you might first have chemotherapy and radiation to shrink the tumor.

During surgery, we remove part or most of the esophagus (esophagectomy), including:

- The portion of the esophagus that contains cancer.
- Lymph nodes near the esophagus.
- Possibly part of the stomach.

We create a new esophagus, usually from the stomach.



It takes time to recover from this surgery. You'll remain in the hospital for at least one week. During your hospital stay, we watch you closely for side effects, some of which can be serious. They include:

- Infection
- Lung complications, such as pneumonia
- Leakage of food where the remaining esophagus and stomach reattach

If you develop any side effects, you may need to remain in the hospital for more treatment.

Endoscopic Treatment

You may have an esophageal cancer treatment that is performed by using a thin, flexible video camera (endoscope) used to diagnose your cancer.

We may also use this type of treatment to:

- Manage cancer in very early stages.
- Control symptoms caused by advanced esophageal cancer.



Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy uses high-energy radiation, such as X-rays, to kill cancer cells. The most common type delivers radiation from a machine outside the body (external-beam radiation therapy).

In some cases, radioactive material is placed inside your body to deliver radiation close to the cancer (brachytherapy).

Radiation is typically used in combination with chemotherapy before or after surgery. It may also be used to relieve symptoms, such as pain or trouble swallowing, from advanced esophageal cancer.

Radiation therapy side effects

Side effects of radiation therapy are often associated with external-beam radiation. Possible side effects include:

- Hair loss
- Skin changes, such as redness and dryness
- Sore throat, dry mouth, and sores in the mouth and throat
- Painful swallowing
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue



Side effects are often worse when chemotherapy is given at the same time. They usually go away after radiation therapy ends.

Permanent side effects are rare but can include lung damage and a narrowing (stricture) in the esophagus, which may need treatment.

Let us know if you develop side effects. We can help manage them so they don't interfere with your quality of life.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells. It's usually given through intravenous (IV) infusion or as pills, depending on the stage of your cancer.

Typically, chemotherapy circulates throughout your entire body (systemic). It can destroy cancer cells that travel outside the esophagus.

Chemotherapy is given alone or along with radiation therapy. It may be used:

- Before surgery, to make the tumor easier to remove.
- After surgery, to kill any remaining cancer cells in the body.
- To relieve symptoms, such as pain and trouble swallowing.

It might also be given with targeted therapy to treat certain esophageal cancers.

Chemotherapy side effects

Chemotherapy targets cells that grow and multiply rapidly, such as cancer cells. It can also affect normal cells that happen to quickly grow and divide, which can cause side effects. The severity depends on the type and dose of the drug and the length of time it's given.

You may experience one or more of these common side effects of chemotherapy:

- Hair loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Mouth sores
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Low blood cell counts

Low blood cell counts are important to monitor because without enough healthy blood cells, you're at higher risk for infections, bleeding, and severe fatigue. If this is an issue, we may give you:

- Drugs to boost your blood counts
- Antibiotics to treat and prevent infections
- Transfusions of red blood cells and platelets

Let us know if you develop side effects. We have effective methods to help prevent and manage these side effects. They usually go away when treatment ends.



Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy uses drugs that attack specific parts of the cancer cell that help it survive and grow.

In a small number of cases, cancer starts at the point where the esophagus joins the stomach (gastroesophageal, or GE junction). Sometimes GE junction tumors make too much of a protein called HER2. The HER2 protein is found in high numbers on the surface of these cancer cells and helps the tumor survive and grow.

A drug that targets HER2 turns off the signal that tells the cancer to grow. If your GE junction cancer tests positive for HER2, we'll talk about this treatment option.

Targeted therapy side effects

Because targeted drugs attack cancer cells, there's less damage to healthy cells. Side effects include:

- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue and weakness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Cough
- Headache
- Low blood cell counts

We'll watch you closely for side effects. Let us know as soon as you notice symptoms.



Self-Care for Managing Side Effects

Your health care team is with you every step of the way. We'll suggest ways to control any treatment side effects that you may experience. Remember, these usually go away after treatment ends, although it may take a little time.

To reduce fatigue:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Try light exercise every day.
- Use relaxation techniques like deep breathing or a simple meditation before bed to help you sleep better.

To control stomach problems:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Have someone else cook for you if preparing meals makes you feel ill.
- Eat bland foods (bananas, rice, or toast) to control diarrhea.
- Eat high-fiber foods (bran or fruit) to limit constipation.
- Eat small meals or snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 meals a day.
- Take medications for nausea.

To care for hair, skin, or mouth problems:

- Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush after each meal.
- Rinse your mouth with half a teaspoon of salt or baking soda mixed in a glass of water.
- Use mild soaps when bathing.
- Apply thick lotions or creams daily over your entire skin to keep the skin moist.
- Avoid using products on the skin, including aloe gel or lotion, that contain alcohol.
- Take short (5 to 10 minute) low-temperature showers.
- Pat your skin dry, instead of rubbing. Avoid using washcloths.
- Protect your scalp by wearing sunscreen or a hat if you're losing hair. Hair usually grows back.

To reduce the risk of infection:

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid contact with people who are currently sick, such as with a cold or flu.

Your Life, Your Way

We encourage you to live your life as normally as you can during treatment. It can help to stick to regular routines and continue doing things you enjoy as much as possible. After treatment ends and you've had time to recover and get stronger, it will be time to move forward with your life.

Some ways to help maintain control over your life are to:

- Communicate what you feel and ask for what you need.
- Keep a diary of treatments, medications, and side effects.
- Bring family or friends with you to appointments to help keep track of details. This can help them as well.
- Write down questions for your doctor and care team so you won't forget to ask them.
- Let your care team know about symptoms or problems—whether you're feeling better or worse, good or bad. They can respond when they know what's happening in your life.



Our commitment to you continues after treatment.

This includes follow-up, rehabilitation, and survivorship support services.

Support at Every Step

Many aspects of your life may change after your diagnosis. People around you will also be concerned about your well-being. This can trigger a lot of different emotions.



For many people, reaching out to cancer survivors with similar experiences can be helpful. They can offer encouragement and understanding. It may help to know that others get through this even though it can be tough.

Recovering from major surgery and cancer treatment can be both physically and emotionally difficult. It's common to feel anxious or even depressed after your treatment. You may have trouble sleeping and eating. This is normal.

We encourage you to share and discuss your emotions with those around you and with your care team. Kaiser Permanente also offers support services, including counseling, support groups, and psychiatric care.

Let us know how you're feeling. Your care team can respond to any symptoms or problems you may have.

Remember, we are here to support you in every way we can for as long as you need us.

We offer complete care for you and your family before, during, and after treatment. This includes:

- Individual counseling
- Symptom management
- Cancer support groups
- Nutrition counseling
- Health education classes
- Follow-up services
- Rehabilitation

Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are research studies that involve cancer patients. They test new ways to prevent, detect, diagnose, or treat cancer. Those who take part in clinical trials have an opportunity to contribute to our greater knowledge about cancer, and to help in the development of improved cancer prevention and treatments.

Kaiser Permanente is nationally recognized as a leading research organization. We are part of the **National Cancer Institute (NCI) Community Oncology Research Program**.

We participate in more than 70 clinical trials available to patients at any given time. Because of this, our patients have access to cutting edge treatment options and research.

We believe it's important for you to understand all of your treatment options, including being part of a clinical trial. If you're interested, talk with your cancer care team.



Kaiser Permanente Resources

Member Services Department

Member Services will help answer your questions and obtain the services or assistance you may need related to:

- Health plan benefits, premiums, and copay explanations
- Your enrollment status
- Registration on kp.org (so you can email your doctor or view visit summaries)
- Getting or replacing a member ID card
- Advance Health Care Directives and Durable Powers of Attorney
- Health plan coverage while traveling
- Information about health plan documents

You can offer suggestions or convey concerns to Member Services in person at your medical center, online, or by phone:

- Member Services Call Center: (800) 464-4000
- Senior Advantage and Medicare: (800) 443-0815

Insurance and Employment

You may be concerned about how your treatments may affect your job and insurance status. Your care team will work with you to manage any side effects and minimize their impact on your normal schedule.

You may still need to change your regular work hours or take time off work to recover from treatments. If this happens, your care team social worker can connect you to insurance and employment resources to help manage changes. Ask your social worker for further information about California and federal regulations and programs, such as:

- State Disability Insurance (SDI)
- California Paid Family Leave Program
- Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

Release of Medical Information (ROMI) Department

You may need to send part of your Kaiser Permanente (KP) medical record to another organization. For example, Kaiser Permanente members applying for disability insurance through the California Employment Development Department (EDD) may request copies of medical records to support their application. We only release medical information by request of the patient. Only members or their legal agent may authorize release of medical information.

To obtain information from your Kaiser Permanente medical record, your care team can direct you to the Release of Medical Information Department (ROMI), which will help you complete the necessary documentation.

If you need to forward medical information from a non-Kaiser Permanente physician to KP, you can ask your non-Kaiser Permanente provider to send the information directly to your Kaiser Permanente primary doctor (not to ROMI). Your Kaiser Permanente primary doctor will review outside medical records before including the information to your file.

If you are seeking medically related time off from work or applying for Family Medical Leave (FMLA), you do not need to request a form from ROMI. Instead, ask for “Work Status Activity Forms” from your doctor.



Financial Services Department

If you have concerns or questions about medical bills, payments, refunds, or need financial assistance during or after a hospital stay, you can contact a Patient Financial Advisor in the Financial Services Department.

Financial Services is also responsible for billing all non-Kaiser Permanente plans on a patient’s behalf, including Medicare, Medi-Cal, Third Party Liability (TPL), Coordination of Benefits (COB), Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), and secondary insurance companies.

Patient Financial Advisors are available to answer questions about alternative payment needs or to help locate resources and assist during and after a hospital stay. You can ask your care team or social worker about the best way to contact an Advisor at your facility.

Additional Resources

- **Kaiser Permanente Cancer Care**
kp.org/mydoctor/cancer
- **American Cancer Society**
cancer.org
- **National Cancer Institute**
cancer.gov
- **Cancer Care**
cancercares.org



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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