

# LIVING WITH YOUR PET AFTER YOUR CANCER DIAGNOSIS

**For many pet owners, a cancer diagnosis is usually followed by the question: “Do I have to give up my pet?” With the right precautions, however, a cancer patient can continue to live with and love their pets.**

## SHOULD I KEEP MY PET?

Yes, many health care providers actively encourage cancer patients to continue to care for their pets and, in some instances, adopt a pet.



## CAN I GIVE MY PET COVID-19

Much is still unknown regarding COVID-19. A number of animals have tested positive, including cats and dogs. If there is a positive COVID-19 case in your household, you should isolate yourself away from your pets just as you would with other members of your family.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Can I give my pet cancer?** No, you cannot give your pet cancer. Cancer is not contagious between human beings and their pets. There is no biological mechanism for any transmission of cancer from person to animal or from animal to person.

**I have cancer—will any of my cancer treatments harm my pet?** Your cancer treatments will not make your pet ill, except in rare instances. One example is brachytherapy, where your radioactive implant can cause issues, especially if you have a small pet. Precautions also need to be taken when it comes to the following types of tests: PET (positron emission tomography); certain CT (computed tomography); and certain MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). For further information, please see CancerCare’s Fact Sheets: “What to Know if You Are Undergoing Radiation Therapy and Have a Pet” and “What to Know if You Are Undergoing Chemotherapy and Have a Pet”.

**Will my medication harm my pet if ingested by accident?** Yes, if your pets come into contact with your medication, it can make them very ill. You should bring your pets to the veterinarian straight away if they ingest your drugs. As an example, drugs such as ibuprofen have been known to cause kidney failure in some animals.

## PLEASE NOTE

Immunocompromised—Having a weakened immune system. People who are immunocompromised have a reduced ability to fight infections and other diseases.

Source: <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/immunocompromised>



### **Should I bring my pets to the veterinarian and make sure they are up-to-date on vaccines, etc.?**

Yes, after your cancer diagnosis, it is advisable to bring your pets to the veterinarian to ensure they are up-to-date on vaccines and medications. An unhealthy pet has the potential to cause harm to a cancer patient, especially if the cancer patient is immunocompromised. It is important that your pet has no fleas, ticks and parasites. Your veterinarian can work with you to determine the appropriate tests and treatments for your pets.

**Can I clean my cat's litter box?** Yes, most cancer patients will be able to clean their cats' litter boxes, especially if they take precautions such as wearing a mask and gloves. However, you should consult with your health care provider regarding the safety of cleaning a litter box if you are severely immunocompromised or receiving total body radiation.

**Do I need to put the toilet seat down?** Yes, after your cancer treatments, you should keep the toilet lid in your home closed to prevent your pet from drinking contaminated water out of the toilet bowl. You may be excreting some of the drugs that are in your system and animals should never be exposed to these toxins.

**Is it safe to allow my pet outside?** You should not allow your pet to play outside with wild or stray animals, sick animals or animals that you are unsure are under veterinarian care. You should also ensure your pet is kept on a leash or under close supervision when it is outside.

**Some final thoughts.** Is it safe to have a pet if you are a cancer patient? Yes, as long as you take the correct precautions. Talk to your health care provider team and ask them any questions you may have. (See also CancerCare's "Suggested Questions to Ask Your Health Care Provider Team"). Except in certain circumstances, you should be able to maintain that wonderful bond between you and your beloved pet.

### **The CancerCare® Pet Assistance and Wellness (PAW) Program**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. The financial assistance component of the CancerCare PAW Program has helped over 1,300 clients keep their pets in their homes.

This fact sheet is for people living with cancer and caring for their pets and it includes important information for them and their loved ones, as well as health care professionals and veterinarians.

For additional information please visit [www.cancercare.org/paw](http://www.cancercare.org/paw) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/CancerCare](https://www.facebook.com/CancerCare)

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