

Using Surgery as a Cancer Treatment

Watching Byron Darden glide across the rink, you can tell: he *owns* the ice. As a former professional figure skater and coach to Olympic-level skaters, Byron is a master figure skater.

"It's a great mind training sport, it's a great mental and emotional training ground. We all have something in our lives that we've had to be disciplined about, and if we can draw on that discipline, it will help us get through things such as this."-Byron, Patient

For Byron, *"this,"* was prostate cancer. When he was diagnosed eight months ago, he was given various treatment options, and chose to have surgery.

"I felt really prepared going into the surgery; I felt grounded in knowing this was what I had chosen – this was what I needed to do; and I'm going to make it work the best way that I can."-Byron, Patient

Of all treatments for cancer, surgery is the oldest. But today's procedures have improved over those just a few decades ago. Advances such as so-called minimally invasive surgery, which is used to treat certain cancers, can be easier on patients.

"The recovery with minimally invasive surgery is usually quicker than with, with big cuts. You'll have small, little puncture incisions with a little bit of numbness there. And usually, people tolerate their scars well, they heal-up nicely."-Dr. Deborah Axelrod, MD, Surgical Oncologist

Regardless of the type of surgery, here are some questions to ask your healthcare team beforehand: Will I need to stay in the hospital – or will I be going home the same day? How long will my recovery be? What type of scar will I have – and how many? And will I have numbness where the cut was made? – and how long will it last?

After surgery, your care team will prescribe medication to control pain. Though you shouldn't use it any longer than necessary, don't be afraid to take it as directed.

"I always tell my patients – there are no prizes for suffering. I don't want a person to suffer, because it actually ends up being detrimental to their care."-Dr. Marleen Meyers, MD, Oncologist

You will have bandages over the sites where the surgery was done. Find out when it's okay to remove them – and how to care for the wounds.

Alert your care team if you have: excessive bleeding or bruising; swelling; fever or chills, which can be signs of infection; shortness of breath; traces of blood in your urine; or pain that's not decreasing over time. You may feel tired for a few days or weeks after surgery. If so, that's normal.

"Everybody heals differently. You know, some people get up and go; and some people take a longer time to

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heal."- Dr. Deborah Axelrod, MD, Surgical Oncologist

For some cancers, your best chance at a good outcome is having surgery done as soon as possible after diagnosis. In other cases, it may be okay to wait – and have your healthcare provider keep an eye on the cancer. Still other cancers are treated by shrinking the tumor before doing surgery to remove it.

"We call that 'Neo-Adjuvant Therapy,' or Chemotherapy or Radiation therapy up-front."- Dr. Deborah Axelrod, MD, Surgical Oncologist

And sometimes additional treatment is given *after* surgery. Known as Adjuvant Therapy, it aims to kill cancer cells that surgery didn't remove to keep the cancer from coming back.

While adjuvant therapy can be an effective part of treatment, it's not guaranteed to work and may have side effects. Whether it's right for you depends on the type and stage of your cancer, the odds of the therapy helping, and your wishes about how aggressively to treat the cancer. Discuss the pros and cons with your provider.

Byron and his health care team decided he didn't need any other treatment after his surgery.

"I've been very fortunate. There is no sign of cancer in my body, as a result."-Byron, Patient

Byron says the drive and determination it took to become a professional skater taught him a lot about overcoming life's challenges – but this experience has also taught him about facing fear.

"And that's the one thing I would say to just about anybody: Yeah, you're going to be fearful, you're going to be – scared, to make that choice. And, yet, you've been given a choice, and it's a choice to live, and to be healthy. And I would deal with the fear, just to have – that."-Byron, Patient