

# Lifestyle habits can alleviate the effects of cancer treatment in children

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Over the past 30 years, the success rate of pediatric cancer treatments has improved dramatically. It is now above 80%—and even higher for some cancers.

While the reduction in mortality is heartening, there's a downside: about two-thirds of children who survive [cancer](#) will later suffer adverse effects from the [aggressive treatments](#) they received at a young age.

Cancer treatments can cause damage to growing bodies, including neurocognitive, endocrine and cardiometabolic complications such as dyslipidemia, hypertension and prediabetes.

To alleviate these effects, several years ago a multidisciplinary research team at Sainte-Justine children's hospital in Montreal—including Valérie Marcil, a professor in the Department of Nutrition at Université de Montréal—launched an initiative called Projet VIE.

The project has proven successful and is being extended this summer to all university hospitals in Quebec that treat children with cancer: CHU de Québec-Université Laval, CHU de Sherbrooke and the Montreal Children's Hospital.

## **Intervening as soon as possible**

Projet VIE and its Quebec-wide version, Projet VIE-Québec, promote healthy lifestyle habits (nutrition, [physical activity](#) and [mental health](#)) to mitigate the effects of cancer during and after treatment.

"The aim is to promote the well-being of children and teens with cancer," Marcil said. "We intervene as soon as possible after diagnosis because the treatments quickly cause changes" such as digestive complications and the ability to properly taste food.

Projet VIE has nutritionists who provide personalized follow-up and lead cooking workshops to encourage children and their families to eat a [balanced diet](#), help them discover new foods and make eating an enjoyable experience again.

Patients and their families also receive psychological counseling and participate in physical activities, since exercise has protective effects on many of the body's systems.

## **'They've regained their confidence'**

Young people who take part in Projet VIE along with their families appreciate the support provided by the program, Marcil said.

"Many children with cancer feel a loss of control over their bodies and develop a negative self-image. With this more comprehensive approach, they tell us they've regained the confidence to be physically active and rediscovered the joy of eating."

Marcil believes promoting a [healthy lifestyle](#) will also yield long-term benefits, particularly for cardiometabolic health, and she'll be studying this hypothesis in the coming years.

Provided by University of Montreal

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