

# FRANKLY SPEAKING ABOUT CANCER

## Living Healthy with Cancer

### Diagnosed with Cancer?

Getting a cancer diagnosis and going through treatment can be overwhelming. Suddenly, the simple routines of your life may feel like they've been thrown out the window and several uncertainties seem to lie ahead. However, taking small steps to continue living a healthy lifestyle can not only lessen the rigors of your cancer treatment but also help you regain a sense of control and confidence in your life as you move through this experience. Here are some **essential steps** you can take.

### Starting Point

*Empower yourself by learning about ways to improve your overall wellbeing.*

- Take a personal effort to become educated about your cancer diagnosis, treatment, health care team, and ways to improve your health as you go through treatment. Get to know your health care team, ask for further resources, and take initiative in doing your own research.
- You are the expert in your cancer experience regarding how you feel, what is important to you, and what you want. Take the lead by asking questions to gain knowledge about your cancer treatment to ensure that you are comfortable with the decisions you make and the actions you take.

### Work Collaboratively

*Communicate with your health care team to ensure your care is best tailored to you.*

- Your active participation in the choices you make with your health care team is a way to gain confidence through your cancer experience and improve your quality of life.
- Knowing who is on your team will make it easier to manage your treatment and find resources you need. In addition to your oncologist, other key players on your health care team may include nurses, physicians, social workers, nutritionists, radiologists, surgeons, mental health specialists, and many others. Together, you and your health care team can tailor your steps to live healthily through your cancer treatment.



*People with cancer who actively participate in their care along with their health care team will improve the quality of their lives and may enhance the possibility of recovery.*

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

- What is your role in my cancer care? How can I best utilize your expertise?
  - What is the stage, type, and spread of my cancer and what does this mean for me?
  - What treatments are best for me and why? What are the risks and benefits of each treatment option?
  - How much will my treatment cost? Who can I talk to regarding issues with insurance?
  - Where can I learn more about my diagnosis and treatment options?
  - What side effects should I expect? What are ways that I can manage them?
  - What can I do to feel better?
  - Who can I contact for any questions and concerns? Who do I call to report my symptoms and side effects to? What is the best way to communicate with my health care team?
  - Can I speak with another patient with a diagnosis similar to mine regarding his or her treatment?
- Before you begin your treatment, it may be helpful to work with your health care team to develop a written treatment plan. This can be a useful communication tool for you and your health care team to discuss the full scope of what is to come.
  - Make the most out of your appointments by:
    - Researching your treatment options
    - Writing down questions beforehand
    - Taking notes or recording the appointment
    - Bringing someone with you to your appointments
    - Relaying back information to your doctor so that everyone is on the same page
    - Digesting and understanding the information before you leave the appointment
    - Asking questions and having your health care team clarify the information they are trying to convey

## Manage your Care

### *Take initiative in managing your cancer care and side effects.*

- Cancer treatment usually involves several medications as some are for the direct treatment of cancer while additional ones are for managing cancer side effects. It is important to keep track of the medication you are taking to ensure that your treatment is carried out as intended. Use pill organizers, charts, calendars, or a method that works for you to help you stay organized.
- Ask your health care team to print out a list of your medication for you. Review this with your health care team at each clinic appointment so that everyone is fully aware of the medications you are taking. If you have a spouse or caregiver that helps you organize your medication, it will be important to review the list with them as well.
- Take your medication exactly as your doctor tells you and report any side effects that you are experiencing. Also, be sure to talk to your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medicine. Vitamins and supplements should be considered as medication, and you should talk to your health care team prior to taking them to make sure it won't interact with your cancer treatment.

- Side effects from treatment vary from patient to patient. Do not worry; they can be manageable. Open communication with your health care team will ensure that you are getting help to alleviate or lessen the symptoms.
- If you are experiencing legal or financial issues such as those relating to insurance coverage, work, and accessing benefits, let your health care team know and they can direct you to helpful resources to help you along the way so that your cancer care is not impacted.

## Prevent Infections

*Take preventive steps and develop healthy habits to reduce your risk of infections.*

- Chemotherapies and other cancer treatments can compromise your immune system by affecting the blood cells that protect us against disease.
- Practice good hygiene to avoid germs, bacteria, or contracting infectious illnesses. Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing; avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and ears; brush your teeth and tongue; clean your cuts and wounds thoroughly; and avoid individuals who are actively sick with a virus, cold, or contagious disease.
- Developing food safety habits is another way to cut your risk of getting sick. Make sure you wash your hands in warm soapy water before handling, preparing, and eating food. Avoid raw or uncooked meat, poultry, fish or shellfish, and make sure you wash raw produce well before consumption.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people with cancer get the flu vaccine as well as the pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine. Discuss with your health care team about getting these as well as the timing of receiving other vaccines as you go through treatment. It is advisable to avoid using vaccines with live viruses. Do not receive any vaccinations or immunizations without specific approval from your oncology team.

### QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

- What does my blood test number mean? How do they relate to my immune system?
- What are some things I should do to avoid infections?
- What are signs of infection and what should I do if I suspect that I am getting sick?
- Can you explain what vaccines I should receive and when I should get them?
- Can I get vaccinated for the flu and pneumococcal pneumonia? The CDC recommends asking about getting two pneumococcal pneumonia shots.

## Eat Right

*Ensure that you are getting the nutrition that you need.*

- Having a healthy diet will help you better tolerate treatment, lower your risk of infection, and help you heal and recover faster. Talk to a nutritionist or dietician to help direct you towards a healthy diet tailored toward your cancer experience as each cancer patients diet needs vary based on their treatment and side effects. Discuss with your health care team about any dietary restrictions that might accompany treatment.

- When you have cancer, you need the fuel and energy to keep up your strength. Try to get more than five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Extra protein and calories are also recommended to help you heal tissues and fight off infections. Try to eat whole grains and legumes like whole wheat bread or tortillas, oats, brown rice, and beans and lentils. Go easy on fat, salt, sugar, and smoked and pickled foods. Avoid alcohol. Unless advised otherwise by your health care team, drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- You may find that you have a decrease in appetite during treatment. To manage this, try to eat small, frequent snacks rather than three large meals. Plan your largest meal for times of the day when your appetite is better.
- Discuss other eating problems you may be experiencing (nausea, diarrhea, constipation, changes in smell or taste, etc.) with your health care team. There are ways to alleviate these side effects, and your team will guide you in managing them if and when they happen.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK A NUTRITIONIST OR DIETICIAN

- What are your dietary recommendations for someone with cancer?
- How can I eat when I feel nauseated and don't have an appetite?
- What is a healthy weight for me? How can adjust my diet to meet this weight?
- How should my diet be changed to accommodate the side effects I am experiencing?
- How can I get the increased protein and calories that is recommended for cancer patients?

## Stay Active

*Incorporate tailored physical activity as much as you can.*

- Exercise can be a tool to help you regain your sense of control over your body as well as improve your physical and mental health. Benefits of exercise for a cancer patient include reduction in depression and anxiety, lowering of the risk of diseases such as heart disease and osteoporosis, and overall improvement of quality of life.
- The American College of Sports Medicine convened a panel of experts to develop recommended exercise guidelines for cancer patients. They recommend moderate-paced activity 30 minutes a day, five days a week, with considerations and adaptations to the individual's needs.
- Be sure to speak with your health care team before beginning any exercise program. Exercise regimens need to be customized to your fitness level as well as your current diagnosis and treatment. They will advise you on what precautions to take and provide suggestions for exercise that is safe for you.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT EXERCISE TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

- Is my body and heart healthy enough for me to exercise?
- What type of exercise is safe and beneficial for me?
- What precautions should I take when it comes to exercising?
- How often and when should I and should I not exercise?

- Feeling fatigued from cancer treatment may deter you from exercising. However, many studies show that exercise can reduce the symptoms of tiredness and break the cycle of fatigue. Try exercising for small amounts of time several times a day rather than one long extended time period. Schedule your exercise for the time of day you feel most energized. If you're too tired, try doing stretching exercises for 10 minutes instead.
- Try incorporating exercise into your daily routine such as walking around the neighborhood after dinner, taking the dog for a walk, using the stairs instead of the elevator, etc. Ask your friends and family for support or get a workout buddy to help you stay motivated to exercise.

## Think Positively

*Reach out to others and learn about ways to manage your stress.*

- Cancer can be stressful but know that you are not alone and there are many people and resources to help you cope with your distress. You have your health care team, your family, and friends to provide support for you. There are also many free support groups and educational programs to help you find your way through this experience. With education and support, you can be assured that you will be able to deal with the many issues and emotions that cancer brings.
- It is helpful to recognize the emotions you are feeling. Find ways to express your feelings such as writing in a journal or sharing your feelings with others. Don't underestimate the importance of seeking help if you feel overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, or depressed about your diagnosis.
- Developing stress management habits will alleviate some of the pressure you feel from your cancer treatment. Reduce your stress by making do to lists to stay organized, breaking down tasks into smaller steps, and asking for help when needed.
- Feeling some stress and worries from your cancer treatment is normal, but take time to relax and relieve your tensions. Try yoga, tai-chi, breathing exercises, or other outlets to help you unwind. Many find that turning to their spiritual side may help; try mediating or going to a relaxing setting to let go of your anxieties.

### **TRY TO BE PRO-ACTIVE AND ASK YOURSELF**

- What is important to me?
- How can I improve my health? How can I do more exercise and eat more healthy foods?
- Do I get enough rest?
- Can I spend more time with people I enjoy?
- Can I make plans to do something I'll look forward to?
- Can I do things that will give me a hopeful sense of peace?

# Maintain Hope

*You may have cancer, but cancer doesn't have you.*

- Many people with cancer find new ways to think about their lives and priorities. You can find meaning in your cancer experience that is inspiring to you and to those around you.
- It's important to appreciate the hopeful details in every moment. Try to do what you can to feel healthy and gain energy. Try to spend time with people who make you feel good.

## KEY STEPS TOWARDS A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- **Set goals:** Choose behaviors or actions to work towards to help make changes stick and keep you motivated.
- **Ask for help:** There are many people who want to help you. They can help you focus on taking those steps to being healthy.
- **Track your progress:** It will help to see how far you've come in reaching your goal and allow you to adjust accordingly.
- **Be patient with yourself:** Change takes times and setbacks may occur. Focus how on what you've achieved and move forward.
- **Recognize your achievements and reward yourself:** Look at all that you have accomplished. Take time to be proud of yourself.

# CSC Resources for Support

*Cancer Support Community's resources and programs below are available at no charge.*

## Open to Options™



Free one-on-one decision counseling from licensed mental health professionals who can help patients process information about their situation, and formulate a list of specific questions for the oncologist. Appointments can be made by calling 888.793.9355 and by visiting the CSC website to contact an affiliate providing the Open to Options service.

## Affiliate Network Services

Almost 60 locations plus more than 100 satellites around the country offer on-site support groups, educational workshops, yoga, nutrition and mind-body programs specifically designed for people affected by cancer at no cost. For a full list of affiliate locations, visit the Cancer Support Community website or call us toll free at 888.793.9355

## The Living Room, online

Cancer Support Community's "The Living Room" offers much of the same programming available at each CSC affiliate. On CSC's website you will find online support groups, discussion boards and social networking, "build your own website" services, and education materials for patients and caregivers.

*These services are made available with generous contributions from CSC supporters.*

**To access these services, visit [www.cancersupportcommunity.com](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.com).**

**VALUABLE RESOURCES**

**General Cancer Information, Survivorship, & Support**

<b>Cancer Support Community (CSC)</b>	888-793-9355	<a href="http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org">www.cancersupportcommunity.org</a>
<b>American Cancer Society (ACS)</b>	800-227-2345	<a href="http://www.cancer.org">www.cancer.org</a>
<b>CancerCare</b>	800-813-4673	<a href="http://www.cancercares.org">www.cancercares.org</a>
<b>Cancer.net</b>	800-651-3038	<a href="http://www.cancercares.net">www.cancercares.net</a>
<b>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</b>	800-232-4636	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov">www.cdc.gov</a>
<b>National Cancer Institute (NCI)</b>	800-422-6237	<a href="http://www.cancer.gov">www.cancer.gov</a>
<b>National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship</b>	888-650-9127	<a href="http://www.canceradvocacy.org">www.canceradvocacy.org</a>
<b>LIVESTRONG</b>	855-220-7777	<a href="http://www.livestrong.org">www.livestrong.org</a>

**Financial & Legal Support**

<b>Cancer and Careers</b>	646-929-8032	<a href="http://www.cancerandcareers.org">www.cancerandcareers.org</a>
<b>Cancer Legal Resources Center</b>	866-843-2572	<a href="http://www.cancerlegalresourcescenter.org">www.cancerlegalresourcescenter.org</a>
<b>Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)</b>	800-532-5274	<a href="http://www.patientadvocate.org">www.patientadvocate.org</a>
<b>Social Security Administration</b>	800-722-1213	<a href="http://www.socialsecurity.gov">www.socialsecurity.gov</a>
<b>State Health Insurance Assistance Programs</b>	800-633-4227	<a href="http://www.medicare.gov/contacts">www.medicare.gov/contacts</a>

**Caregiver Support, Complementary Support**

<b>National Family Caregivers Association</b>	800-896-3650	<a href="http://www.nfcares.org">www.nfcares.org</a>
<b>National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine</b>	888-644-6226	<a href="http://nccam.nih.gov">http://nccam.nih.gov</a>



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