

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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## CANCER SURVIVORSHIP

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP



It's a rare person who has not been touched by cancer. Just about all of us has had a family member or close friend, or maybe even ourselves, who has struggled with a serious cancer diagnosis. Even the word "cancer" still fills us with fear. Those who have received a cancer diagnosis remember the exact moment in time when the words were spoken and their lives were never quite the same.

A cancer diagnosis begins the journey of treatment and recovery. Often the treatments have their own side effects, and a person not only recovers from the cancer but also recovers from the treatment. This is the beginning of survivorship. With earlier diagnosis and better treatments, cancer is no longer a death sentence. In fact more than 13.7 million cancer survivors live in the United States, and 64.8% lived five or more years. Of these, 59.5% were people 65 and older, (*Health After 50*, John Hopkins Medicine, October 2012).

There has been a great deal of interest in learning through research how people feel who have survived cancer and its treatment. Many long-term survivors report few cancer related symptoms and generally have a high quality of life. One study found that 71% of survivors had no symptoms 5 to 6 years after treatment, (*Jacobs, Fatigue, Pain, Sleep: Evidenced-Based Management Strategies in Cancer Survivors*, Survivorship Conference, City of Hope, 2012). Those who do have symptoms may experience fatigue, pain, cognitive changes, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and constipation.

Often the symptoms are not specific for a certain type of cancer, and many times the symptoms are related to chronic health problems, not to cancer. But of those who experience symptoms, one third report fatigue. The second most common symptom is pain, and it is most likely related to the type of cancer or treatment. Poor sleep is the third most common symptom. Cancer survivors who experience any of these symptoms should seek help and treatment.

Sometimes when treatment is completed, the survivor loses contact with the cancer treatment team. But that should not stop a person from seeking advice from their primary care providers. It's extremely important to have ongoing follow-up so that distressing symptoms can be alleviated.

It is equally important to have follow-up even when a person feels completely well, as the majority of survivors do. For example, cancer survivors are at greater risk for developing another cancer and need to have annual screenings. Some treatments with chemo and radiation can cause later effects on the heart and lungs. Therefore, new symptoms of shortness of breath or chest pain need to be evaluated, keeping in mind, that they may be caused by the late effects of cancer treatments.

The American Cancer Society recently issued formal Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Cancer Survivors with the objective of preventing reoccurrence or the development of a second primary cancer:

- Eat a healthy diet, high in whole grains, colorful fruits and vegetables
- Limit red meat and added sugar



- Avoid dietary supplements and instead get nutrients from real food
- Be physically active, getting 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week; devote two sessions/week to strength training
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight; obesity is a major risk factor for many cancers

Emotional stress accompanies every cancer diagnosis. Initial stress reactions change over time as treatment progresses, but most people continue to feel that every new symptom may mean a reoccurrence of their cancer. But the majority of survivors do not feel depressed. Instead, survivors often feel a greater appreciation of life and for their families and friends. An encounter with cancer is life-altering and can bring into focus what is really important to an individual.

Getting support from other cancer survivors is one of the best ways that survivors learn to cope. There are support groups, phone support and informational organizations for various kinds of cancer. Support from other survivors gives a new survivor courage and understanding in ways that only a fellow survivor can give.

**AFTER CANCER**  
by Genie Gravelin

We learn to take the "little things" in stride.  
 We concentrate on positive energy and the beauty that surrounds us.  
 We rush less, laugh more and live with greater intensity.  
 We have a deeper understanding of how quickly the years pass, so we try to get as much as we can out of every day.

**COMING ATTRACTIONS**

A very special health education lecture is planned with the internationally-known Director of MGH Center for Laryngeal Surgery and Voice Rehabilitation, Dr. Steven Zeitels. He will speak on "The Human Larynx in Medicine and Surgery" at 7:15 p.m. on Thursday, May 23 in Center Auditorium. Not to be missed!

On Tuesday, May 14, Dr. Jane Ebert, Professor from Brandeis University, will give a talk on "Choice, Motivation and Health," a research, fundraising event. Following her talk, there will be an opportunity to participate in her research by completing a 20-minute questionnaire on the topic of health experiences and motivation. A donation of \$15.00 will be made to the Resident Association for each participant. Join us from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. in Center Auditorium.

**ANNOUNCEMENT:**  
**NEW SATURDAY NURSE PRACTITIONER**

We are happy to announce that Sarah Fowler, NP has joined the Saturday Clinic crew. Sarah received her Masters in Science in Nursing with an Adult and Gerontology specialty from MGH Institute of Health Professions. She has worked as a nurse practitioner for Evercare in long-term care settings as well as with a physician practice. She has also been on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Currently she is the Manager of Clinical Programs for Tufts Senior Products. Before gaining these experiences, she was an NP student at CWV and worked on Caswell as an RN during her student days. It's great to welcome her back! Sarah will work one Saturday each month and fill in from time to time when Barbara Chenoweth is on vacation.