

Guide to Healthy Living

# PHYSICAL HEALTH



# HERE'S TO YOU

Everyone experiences cancer in a different way. And when it comes to a path forward after treatment, one size does not fit all. But three areas of physical health—nutrition, physical activity, and sleep—are important for all cancer survivors and key to your recovery and well-being.

Finding your “new normal” as a cancer survivor is a journey. That’s where this guide comes in. You’ll find expert information, practical tips, and trusted resources that will help you and your care partners come up with a plan that feels right for where you are today.

## OUR GUIDE CAN HELP YOU

- Understand how healthy eating, exercise, and sleep can have a positive effect on your health.
- Realize the common struggles that cancer survivors face.
- Identify your specific needs and challenges so you feel more comfortable talking about them.
- Find experts in your community who can help you start and keep healthy habits.
- Learn ways to care for your loved ones as a cancer survivor or as a caregiver.

“Just give yourself leniency. Give yourself space. Because you can’t hold yourself to a standard that you lived before. You have to give yourself that room to grow into the new you.”

**MARK**

*Hodgkin Lymphoma*

# STAYING HEALTHY

When your treatment is finished, your doctor may tell you that you should get checkups or tests in the future. This is called *follow-up care*. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions. These tests can help find early signs of a new cancer or the return of the same cancer.

## DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT STAYING HEALTHY AFTER CANCER TREATMENT?

In the “Talk to Someone” simulation, Linda, a cancer survivor, gives advice on alcohol, tobacco, physical activity and nutrition, and anxiety and distress. You can choose different options to get answers to your questions about making healthy choices.



[www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/life-after-cancer/talk-to-someone-simulation.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/life-after-cancer/talk-to-someone-simulation.htm)



# EATING HEALTHY

## WHY IS FOOD IMPORTANT?

Quite simply, the food you eat affects how you feel. A healthy diet can help you feel better, regain your strength and energy, and reduce risks for health problems like heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. But before making any big changes to your diet, check with your doctor to make sure you don't have any food or dietary restrictions.

## IT ISN'T ALWAYS EASY TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES

Eating a healthy diet can be hard. You may be nauseated or not feel hungry. You may notice changes in the way some foods taste, especially if you're taking certain medicines. You may also have to avoid certain foods.

For many cancer survivors, caregivers, and their loved ones, balancing the need to eat differently with the demands of the rest of the household may feel overwhelming. People may be busy or on different schedules. Not everyone may agree with a new, healthier approach to eating. And it may be hard to find or afford healthier options.

**“Take care of yourself. Your health and your life are just as important. You need to take care of and put yourself first so that you can be around for the others who love you and need you the most.”**

**WENORA**

*Basal Cell Carcinoma, Colorectal, and Endometrial Cancer*



## TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING

Here are some steps you can take to overcome challenges. Try the ones that make sense for you, and don't feel you need to do them all at once! It's all about baby steps.

- Keep track of what you eat. Use a notebook or an app to write down what and how much you eat.
- Ask your doctor what you can't eat with medicines you take or allergies you have.
- Try to eat meals at the same time every day. When your body is used to eating at the same time, you can manage how much you eat better.
- If you're having trouble regaining your appetite, start with small meals of your favorite foods.
- Try healthier versions of your favorite recipes. Many healthy and easy-to-follow recipes are available online.
- When you're able to eat more foods, try to fill half your plate with fruit and vegetables. The other half of your plate can be a mix of lean proteins and whole grains.
- Think of sugar-sweetened food and drinks and alcohol as treats for special occasions.

## MORE INFORMATION

- CDC's **Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight** website provides helpful tips and recipes. [www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy\\_eating/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/)
- The American Cancer Society's **Eat Healthy** page explains how to choose foods for a well-balanced meal plan. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html)
- The **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics** can help you find a nutrition expert. [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)
- The National Cancer Institute's **Nutrition in Cancer Care** page explains how cancer treatments can affect nutrition. [www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/appetite-loss/nutrition-pdq](http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/appetite-loss/nutrition-pdq)



## OPTIONS FOR HEALTHY EATING

If you don't have the time or energy to shop for groceries or cook every day, these tips can make things easier.

- If you can afford it, go out to eat or order pickup or delivery service from a local restaurant. Many restaurants include nutritional information about their menu online, which can help you plan.
- Look for meal delivery programs in your area. Some organizations deliver groceries or prepared meals to people with health issues.
- Explore a meal subscription service, if it fits into your budget.
- Order your groceries online. Many supermarkets offer pickup or delivery.
- Ask for help. Can someone in your household take over or help with cooking? Is a friend or neighbor willing to pick things up when they go out? People want to help, but they may not know what you need.
- Reach out to organizations that offer help.
- Involve family members in meal planning and preparation.
- Set aside one day to prepare meals for the week.

## HOW TO GET YOUR DOCTOR INVOLVED

When you visit your doctor, ask for healthy eating advice. First, think about your goals. Do you want to feel more energetic? Are any side effects bothering you? Do you want to gain or lose weight? Write down questions as you think of them. Some examples:

- Are there foods I should avoid because they may interfere with my medicines or cause side effects?
- Does the cancer or treatment I had affect my appetite?
- Can you recommend a specialist or resource, online or in the community, to help me make dietary changes?

## HOW YOUR CARE TEAM CAN HELP YOU

Your oncologist or primary care doctor may be able to refer you to a nutritionist or dietician. You can also check with the social services division of area hospitals and health departments. In addition, a social worker or case manager can help set up financial assistance or a food delivery program. A specialist can also help you:

- Involve your family or loved ones in making healthy choices.
- Make healthy choices on a budget.
- Find local transportation or food delivery services.

### Ways to Save Money

- When they're on sale, stock up on canned or frozen fruits and vegetables, especially ones that are low in salt and sugar.
- Start a vegetable garden. It's a great way to get outside, get some exercise, and involve the whole family. Some vegetables, like tomatoes and bell peppers, grow easily in a container.
- Consider replacing a meat-based meal with a vegetarian one a few days a week. Try adding peas or beans as a protein substitute.
- Freeze leftovers.

**“I don’t cook a lot. I’m a working mom, so we do a lot of takeout. Just a part of it is my own lifestyle. But the bulk of it all started with cancer and trying to form experiences and just spending and not worrying. Now I’m digging in my 401(k) sooner than I should.”**

**ALISA**  
*Lung Cancer*

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity has many benefits besides helping you feel better. It helps build strength and balance, increases your ability to move and get around, and reduces stress. Cancer survivors who keep a healthy weight and stay physically active may have:

- A better response to treatments.
- A better mental and physical quality of life.
- A lower risk of having cancer come back or developing a new cancer.
- A lower risk of getting other illnesses, such as diabetes or heart disease.

Being physically active doesn't necessarily mean intense workouts. Going for a walk, lightly jogging, dancing, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator are all ways to fit exercise into your day. Try to build up to 30 minutes of movement a day.

## WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

Common challenges to being active include not having enough time or energy, not feeling it's important, or not having access to places to exercise. If you're facing any of these hurdles, start with activities you enjoy and can do safely that work with your lifestyle.

## START SMALL

Think of things you can do in your home or neighborhood. Ease your way into a routine with a walk around the block, sitting and standing up a few times, or lifting household objects like cans of food. Local parks, community centers, some schools, malls, the YMCA, and faith communities are great places to explore exercise options for free or at low cost.

No matter where or how you exercise, always listen to your body. If something hurts or feels wrong, talk to your doctor.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

- Can I exercise?
- What is the right level?
- What can I do or what should I avoid?
- How do I overcome fatigue?

## SPECIALISTS CAN HELP

An exercise physiologist or specialist, physical therapist, or personal trainer can help you become more physically active by:

- Identifying your goals and concerns.
- Determining any safety precautions you should take.
- Recommending and showing you how to do exercises that will help you meet your goals.
- Helping you find support groups, organizations, local teams, or classes.

## MORE INFORMATION

- CDC's **How to Be Physically Active While Social Distancing** page provides ideas for staying active close to home. [www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/how-to-be-physically-active-while-social-distancing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/how-to-be-physically-active-while-social-distancing.html)
- To find a professional exercise expert, visit the **Clinical Exercise Physiology Association (CEPA) registry**. [www.acsm-cepa.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=412](https://www.acsm-cepa.org/content.aspx?page_id=412)
- **Move Your Way** has tools, videos, fact sheets, and tips to make it easier to get more active. <https://health.gov/moveyourway>
- The **American Cancer Society** explains the benefits of good nutrition, regular physical activity, and staying at a healthy weight. [www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active.html](https://www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active.html)
- The National Cancer Institute's **Physical Activity and Cancer fact sheet** answers common questions. [www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/obesity/physical-activity-fact-sheet](https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/obesity/physical-activity-fact-sheet)

**“I stay healthy for any additional cancers that may come in my future. To me, that includes daily exercising, and it doesn’t have to be a lot. For me, it’s just 30 minutes a day taken out of my time to do some very simple components of exercise.”**

#### **WENORA**

*Basal Cell Carcinoma, Colorectal, and Endometrial Cancer*

## **SLEEPING WELL**

Sleep allows your body to refresh, replenish, and rebuild. It helps your immune system work better and keeps you mentally sharp. Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep each night, but talk to your doctor about what’s right for you.

### **HOW SLEEP AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH**

Lack of sleep can raise the risk of health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, and obesity. It can also affect your concentration and memory.

Not getting enough sleep can lead to serious problems for people with cancer, including lower quality of life, depression, and the inability to carry out regular day-to-day activities.

### **HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING IS COMMON**

It’s not uncommon to feel very tired during and after cancer treatment, especially in the first year after treatment. Many things can affect sleep, including anemia, poor nutrition or dehydration, pain or discomfort, side effects of medications, and irregular sleep patterns. Anxiety, depression, fear, worry, and stress can also affect your ability to get enough sleep.

Your doctor or a specialist can help you find ways to save your energy throughout the day and sleep better at night.

## HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS CAN HELP

To improve your quality of sleep, try to:

- Soak up some morning sunlight. This increases levels of the hormone melatonin, which is important for sleep.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on weekends.
- Relax with a book or take a soothing bath.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Remove electronic devices such as TVs, computers, and smart phones from the bedroom.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Get some exercise. Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

## RESOURCES FOR A RESTFUL NIGHT

Health care professionals who specialize in sleep problems can help you. Think about the problems you're having with sleep and talk to your doctor to uncover any triggers. Some questions to ask a doctor or specialist include:

- Is there a treatment or a change I can make to help?
- What support or services are available to address sleep problems?

If you have trouble sleeping, try keeping a sleep diary to share with your doctor. Include information like medicines you take, when you go to bed, how long it takes to fall asleep, your nap schedule, how much you're exercising, and any alcohol or caffeinated beverages you drink.

## WHAT IS MY NEXT STEP?

Now that you've taken a deep breath and are ready for a path forward, let's map out a journey for your well-being. Take some time to reflect on the following prompts and share your responses with your loved ones and your health care support team.

**My questions are** \_\_\_\_\_

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**My next steps are** \_\_\_\_\_

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**My goals are** \_\_\_\_\_

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## MORE INFORMATION

- The **American Academy of Sleep Medicine** provides tips on how to improve your sleep and a list of accredited sleep centers and specialists. <http://sleepeducation.org>
- The **American Cancer Society** offers information and tips to help you understand and manage sleep problems. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/sleep-problems.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/sleep-problems.html)
- The **National Cancer Institute** explains why sleep disorders are common in people with cancer and how they are treated. [www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/sleep-disorders-pdq](http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/sleep-disorders-pdq)

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR CARE PARTNERS

It's easy to forget to take care of yourself when you're busy supporting someone with cancer. But it's just as important.

Caregiving is stressful, and you may be too busy to look after your own needs. So ask yourself:

- Am I getting enough exercise and being physically active?
- Am I eating a healthy diet?
- Am I getting enough quality sleep?
- Am I staying hydrated?

After treatment ends, your role may change, and you may find that's a good time to follow the recommendations for good physical health.

## MORE INFORMATION

- AARP's **Caregiving** page provides family caregivers with information, tools, and resources. [www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/](http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/)
- The **Caregiver Action Network** takes caregivers through step-by-step processes to help them handle their caregiving situation. <https://caregiveraction.org>
- The **Family Caregiver Alliance** helps families find government, nonprofit, and private caregiver support programs. [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)
- The **National Alliance for Caregiving** offers resources and information on caregiving. [www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org)



## HOW TO IDENTIFY CREDIBLE INFORMATION SOURCES

The Internet is full of information, and we want to make sure you're getting the right answers.

When determining whether a website offers good information backed by medical evidence, your best bet is to look at the owner. The most credible sites offer information that is backed by unbiased research and has gone through a strict review process to ensure that everything they publish is accurate and beneficial.

Stick to government sites such as CDC or the National Cancer Institute, or well-known organizations such as CDC's Comprehensive Cancer Control National Partnership, local service groups, or health institutions you know.

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[www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors)

