

## Cancer Survivorship

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### Who Are Cancer Survivors?

Cancer survivors are people who have been diagnosed with cancer and those people in their lives who are affected by the diagnosis, including family members, friends, and caregivers.

An increasing number of people are surviving cancer diagnoses. As the population of cancer survivors grows, the public health community is considering ways to address the issues related to survivorship. Survivorship is a broad term that refers not only to people who have been diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives, but also to the friends and family members of people who have been diagnosed with cancer.



### • Cancer and Survivorship

Because of advances in the early detection and treatment of cancer, individuals are living many years after a diagnosis. As of January 2002, there were approximately 10.1 million cancer survivors in the United States. Today, approximately 65% of people diagnosed with cancer are expected to live at least 5 years after diagnosis.

During diagnosis, treatment, and post-treatment, cancer survivors face physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial issues – issues that are of concern to public health professionals. For example, because of genetic predispositions, common lifestyle factors, and the effects of cancer treatments, cancer survivors are at increased risk for certain health problems after diagnosis and treatment. In light of these concerns, public health initiatives that strive to understand and prevent secondary disease and recurrence, and to improve survivors' quality of life, are essential.

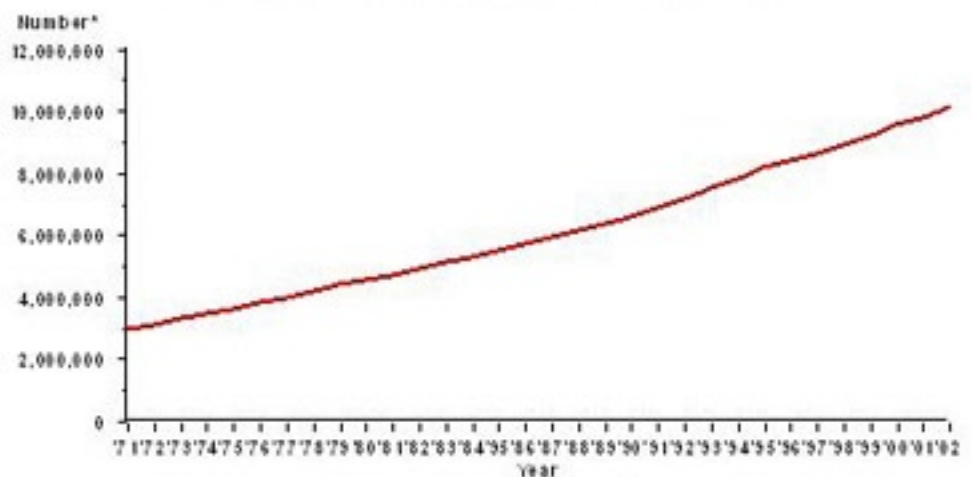
### Risk Factors

- Age is a primary risk factor for most cancers. In fact, approximately 56.5% of all cancers are diagnosed among individuals aged 65 years or older.
- Smoking is a preventable risk factor for cancer recurrence and second cancers. Smoking also contributes to primary cancers.
- Obesity may be related to poorer survival for women diagnosed with breast cancer and to a poor prognosis following a prostate cancer diagnosis.
- Low-income men and women who have inadequate or no health insurance coverage are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at later stages, when survival times are shorter.

### Screening

Cancer survivors are at greater risk for recurrence and for developing second cancers, because of the effects of treatment, continued lifestyle behaviors, underlying genetics, or risk factors that contributed to the first cancer. Although screening guidelines are not available for all cancers, survivors should discuss with their doctors at the end of treatment the appropriate schedule for screening, as well as the types of screening needed. Survivors also should decide who will be responsible for monitoring this screening schedule long-term.

### Estimated Number Cancer Survivors in the United States, from 1971 to 2002



\*U.S. 2002 cancer prevalence counts are based on 2002 cancer prevalence proportions from the SEER 9 registries and 1/1/2002 U.S. population estimates based on the average of 2001 and 2002 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau

## A Survivor's Wellness Plan

After cancer treatment, many survivors want to find ways to reduce the chances of their cancer coming back. Some worry that the way they eat, the stress in their lives, or their exposure to chemicals may put them at risk. Cancer survivors find that this is a time when they take a good look at how they take care of themselves. This is an important start to living a healthy life.

When you meet with your doctor about follow-up care, you should ask about developing a wellness plan that includes ways you can take care of your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. If you find that it's hard to talk with your doctor about these issues, it may be helpful to know that the more you do it, the easier it becomes. And your doctor may suggest other members of the health care team for you to talk with, such as a social worker, clergy member, or nurse.

### Changes You May Want to Think About Making

- **Quit smoking.** Research shows that smoking can increase the chances of getting cancer at the same site or another site.
- **Cut down on how much alcohol you drink.** Research shows that drinking alcohol increases your chances of getting certain types of cancers.
- **Eat well.** Healthy food choices and physical activity may help reduce the risk of cancer or recurrence. Talk with your doctor or a nutritionist to find out about any special dietary needs that you may have. The American Cancer Society and the American Institute for Cancer Research have developed similar diet and fitness guidelines that may help reduce the risk of cancer:
  - Eat a plant-based diet and have at least 5-9 servings of fruit and vegetables daily. Try to include beans in your diet, and eat whole grains (such as cereals, breads, and pasta) several times daily.
  - Choose foods low in fat and low in salt.
  - Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- **Exercise and stay active.** Several recent reports suggest that staying active after cancer can help lower the risk of recurrence and can lead to longer survival. Moderate exercise (walking, biking, swimming) for about 30 minutes every - or almost every - day can:
  - Reduce anxiety and depression
  - Improve mood and boost self-esteem
  - Reduce fatigue, nausea, pain, and diarrhea

It is important to start an exercise program slowly and increase activity over time, working with your doctor or a specialist (such as a physical therapist) if needed. If you need to stay in bed during your recovery, even small activities like stretching or moving your arms or legs can help you stay flexible, relieve muscle tension, and help you feel better. Some people may need to take special care in exercising. Talk with your doctor before you begin any exercise program.

*courtesy of: The National Cancer Institute*



### Finding Comfort and Meaning

- **Read uplifting stories** about the human spirit.
- **Pray or meditate** to help you gain perspective.
- **Take part in community or social gatherings** for your own support and to support others.
- **Talk with others** who have had similar experiences.
- **Find resources** at a place of worship for people dealing with chronic illnesses like cancer.

## Coping With Fear of Cancer Returning

**Be informed.** Learning about your cancer, understanding what you can do for your health now, and finding out about the services available to you can give you a greater sense of control. Some studies even suggest that people who are well-informed about their illness and treatment are more likely to follow their treatment plans and recover from cancer more quickly than those who are not.

**Express your feelings of fear, anger, or sadness.** People have found that when they express strong feelings like anger or sadness, they're more able to let go of them. Some sort out their feelings by talking to friends or family, other cancer survivors, or a counselor. But even if you prefer not to discuss your cancer with others, you can still sort out your feelings by thinking about them or writing them down.

**Look for the positive.** Sometimes this means looking for the good even in a bad time or trying to be hopeful instead of thinking the worst. Try to use your energy to focus on wellness and what you can do now to stay as healthy as possible.

**Don't blame yourself for your cancer.** Some people believe that they got cancer because of something they did or did not do. Remember, cancer can happen to anyone.

**You don't have to be upbeat all the time.** Many people say they want to have the freedom to give in to their feelings sometimes. As one woman said, "When it gets really bad, I just tell my family I'm having a bad cancer day and go upstairs and crawl into bed."

**Be as active as you can.** Getting out of the house and doing something can help you focus on other things besides cancer and the worries it brings.

**Look at what you can control.** Some people say that putting their lives in order helps. Being involved in your health care, keeping your appointments, and making changes in your lifestyle are among the things you can control. Even setting a daily schedule can give you a sense of control. And while no one can control every thought, some say that they try not to dwell on the fearful ones

*courtesy of: The National Cancer Institute*

***For more extensive information on these topics and many others, please visit your online Health & Wellness Library.***



### **American Cancer Society**

**<http://www.cancer.org/>**

This site provides information for survivors on staying healthy after cancer treatment. Nutritional concerns at different phases of cancer survivorship, from active treatment to advanced disease are identified based on the report, "Nutrition During and After Cancer Treatment: A Guide for Informed Choices by Cancer Survivors".

### **American Cancer Society/Cancer Survivor Network**

**<http://www.acscsn.org/>**

A virtual community created by and for cancer survivors and caregivers as an outlet to cope with the challenges and spectrum of emotions that living with cancer can bring.

### **Cancer Survival Toolbox Building Skills that Work for You**

**<http://www.cancersurvivaltoolbox.org/>**

A free, self-learning audio program designed to help cancer survivors and their caregivers meet the challenge of their illness.

### **Cancer Keys to Survivorship**

**<http://www.canceradvocacy.org/programs/keys.aspx>**

A free program that teaches cancer survivors, family members, friends, caregivers and health professionals the important skills to help live with, beyond and through cancer.