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**“The Elements of Healing and Wellness Post Diagnosis of Cancer:  
A Review of the Literature and a Personal Account”**

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Lee Honors College: Thesis Defense, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015



This e-book is written in honor of my healing journey and pursuit of becoming a wellness warrior. I dedicate this project to:

My gracious God,

My cherished family,

My wonderful mentors,

My supportive friends, and

My four-legged fuzzy family

for giving me hope, encouragement, comfort, and reassurance in my darkest of hours.



“Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we’ll ever do.” – Brene Brown

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## **Introduction: Join me in Becoming a Wellness Warrior!**

Forecasting has always been something that I have been good at. There is nothing I love more than dreaming, hoping, praying, and planning for a bright and beautiful future. At the ripe age of 21, I thought I had life figured out in the most glorious way. I knew my career path and had aspirations to become one of the brightest and successful occupational therapists the world has ever known. I was actively involved in a variety of organizations that allowed me to develop myself professionally. My plans were set and nothing was going to stop me!

I was running life's marathon at a steady and even pace when I suddenly lost my breath as I tripped on a crack that I never saw coming. I noticed that I had been feeling quite fatigued for some time and I began to lose weight rapidly. Upon mentioning these symptoms to my mother, she suggested that I see a doctor... and soon. A short doctor's visit with a very concerned physician quickly turned into several nights in the hospital, undergoing several diagnostic tests, a bone marrow biopsy, and a surgical biopsy of an enlarged lymph node near my neck. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I received the numbing diagnosis: Stage Four Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer. The cancer had spread to various lymph nodes throughout my body. Results from a PET scan would later show malignant activity in my spleen, my liver, some involvement in my lungs, and diffuse cancer cells in my bone marrow.

Hodgkin's Lymphoma is a relatively rare form of blood cancer that accounts for around 0.5% of all cancer diagnoses, and the cancer primarily affects younger individuals in their twenties. Thankfully, Hodgkin's Lymphoma is considered a highly curable form of cancer, one in which approximately 80% of those diagnosed are fully cured even at its late stages. I felt

relieved to have been diagnosed with a cancer that is very treatable, but this fact did not take away the fear and anxiety that accompanies being diagnosed with “the big C”.

Faster than you can say “*chemo!*” I was rushed into the whirlwind of the medical oncology system. I was immediately scheduled to receive 12 rounds (six months) of intensive chemotherapy which would aim to target the cancer cells with hopes that they would die. While others my age were enjoying a few beers at the local bar, I was enjoying my biweekly “chemical cocktail”... talk about unfair! The medicine would kill good cells as well, leaving me tired, nauseous, and with a shiny bald head (but get this... I still had to shave my legs! How upsetting is that?). My definition of beauty has since expanded beyond the superficial exterior, and has grown to include a bald version of myself, complete with tired bags under my eyes and my easily bruised skin.

While the chemo was certainly taxing on my body, my diagnosis left me with significantly more emotional scars than physical ones. I quickly realized just how fragile life is, and how precious one’s health and wellness is to their quality of life. As a future occupational therapist with firsthand experience of how difficult disease and illness can be, I can empathize on some level with the physical and emotional hardship that my clients may be experiencing. Life threatening situations have a way of making the individual question their entire life’s purpose, and my hope is to take my personal experiences as a cancer survivor to help others find meaning through their personal struggles.

I quickly learned how to take an adverse event and turn it into a motivating factor to help others going through difficult times. I made the choice to rise above my challenges and work hard to maintain my academic excellence, relationships, and health to the best of my ability. In

an odd sense, cancer turned out to be both the worst and best thing that has happened to me. My goal is to show others that disability or disease can be an opportunity to cease life's beauty, re-evaluate priorities, and transform their fundamental being. When things feel as though they are falling apart, they may be in fact falling together. Dean Ornish, M.D. wrote honestly about the nature of change, to which his words truly resonated with me: "Suffering—whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or as often the case, all three—can be a doorway to transformation" (Remen, 1996).

Of course, I could not have made it through my treatments without the help of my friends and family. I cannot even begin to describe my gratitude to the wonderful people in my life who have shared my highest highs and my lowest lows. More often than not, I was lucky to spend an otherwise dreadful chemo infusion with people who made the hours pass by with more laughs and smiles than tears.

Although I would never wish any cancer experience unto anyone, I cannot help but feel as though God is using this difficult experience to make some revolutionary changes in my life, forcing me to reevaluate my priorities and mission in this life. My life is beginning to get back on track in the most glorious fashion possible. My blood chemistry is finally stabilized and I have been declared in clinical remission. I am proud to say that I wake up every morning with joy and gratitude in my heart for my countless blessings. Simply breathing and smelling the flowers is now the finest form of art to me, in a way it never was before. I am excited to live a purposeful life in service of others who are going through difficult times, given my experiences and confidence that not only does life go on after what seems like an insurmountable crisis; it is possible to find joy in the journey!



My hope is that this book can be used as a healing and wellness resource for individuals going through a scary time in their life. This book is a compilation of information that I have found to be helpful in my healing journey. When you are fighting one of the hardest battles in your life, it is safe to say that you may want the most ammunition you can get your hands on! My wish is for you to not let your illness/ disease/ disability define who are you are. Instead, take control of the situation and strive to make every effort you can to promote your mental, physical, and spiritual healing. Health is something that you do not truly appreciate until it is compromised, so join me in becoming a wellness warrior!

## **Part One: The Elements of Holistic Health and Wellness**

I think we can all agree that striving for optimum health in all senses of our being is a goal that everyone should strive for. Can you imagine a world where all people are operating throughout their days at peak wellness? What would this look like? Some may argue that this would entail primarily physical wellbeing, where aches or pains would not limit what we can or cannot do. While this may be a critical component of wellbeing, it is important to also consider one's mental/ emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing as well. Approaching wellness and healing in a holistic sense allows us to lead fuller, richer, more fulfilled lives when we recognize wellness involving deep connections between our mind, body, and spirit.

In the health professions, it is not uncommon to see individuals at some of the lowest points in their life. Whether it is seeing someone after a traumatic brain injury, stroke, or heart attack, it is easy to see that these medical events can take a huge toll on an individual's life. I think we can all agree that patients can be very vulnerable around this sensitive time in their lives. In years past, the medical model had a tendency to only look at one's physiological, or physical, wellbeing. New approaches in the medical field are recognizing that individuals are much more than a diagnosis or disease. We must consider the whole being when striving to promote and achieve health and wellness.

The World Health Organization, a leading body in the international world of medicine and authority figure for health in the United Nations system, defines "health" in a holistic stance, concluding that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization [WHO], 1948).

Andrea Sullivan of “A Path to Healing: A Guide to Wellness for Body, Mind, and Soul” makes the following point regarding viewing health and healing in a holistic sense:

Health is a process, a continuum from wellness (optimal health) to illness to death. Many people believe wellness is simply an absence of symptoms. But health is more than just a physical condition. It is to be in harmony with oneself, one’s environment, and one’s God. It means being flexible with and accepting of ourselves and others. It involves ways in which we think about and treat ourselves and others. To be well is to have a consciousness of loving for yourself and others. It is to know that you are worthy of having wealth in the form of good health, loving relationships, and prosperity. Being well means recognizing that you are provided for because you are God’s child. Good health trusts the process of life, knowing that everything is perfect even when we don’t like it. Good health is physical and psychological vitality, a passion and enthusiasm that lead to an overall sense of wellness and gratitude for the blessings in life. No matter how negative things may appear, there is gratitude for what is good about life. Usually accompanied by feelings of joy, happiness, and love, good health is absence of dis-ease (a lack of ease or feeling of being ill at ease which is not always or necessarily the same a *disease*), as well as absence of symptoms. When we are truly well, a few physical symptoms are not enough to make us feel unhealthy or ill. Good health is a right. You are entitled to it.

Health is freed from spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical limitations.

Spiritual and mental freedom is the ability to express oneself creatively without egocentrism and to think clearly with compassion and will. Emotionally healthy people are free to experience a wide range of feelings: grief, anger, anxiety. They are able to feel these emotions and yet be detached from them, maintaining an underlying sense of inner peace and balance. Not dwelling on any one emotion, they leave themselves open to the next moment; they experience the fullness of life.

Good health is our responsibility. Because of the stress of lifestyles, foods, and negative thoughts, most of us are operating below zero on a health scale of one to ten. My job is to assist people in getting back up to “one” so that they can then support themselves through the rest of the process. We are in a partnership that involves changing their lifestyles; the patient does the work as well as the healing, I am simply the facilitator. (Sullivan, 1999)

### **What is Healing and Wellness?**

Before beginning to apply the concepts of holistic health in one’s healing and wellness journey, it is critical to understand the difference between healing and wellness. Healing implies that one has been damaged or injured in some way, suggesting that one is not currently whole or incomplete. “Healing is the process of restoration, in which one is made healthy, whole, or sound of mind and body” (Perez, 2004). Whether or not one has a physical disease, illness, or injury, healing can also apply to those with cognitive or mental illnesses, or lack of sense of wellbeing.

Achterberg (1994) considers healing to be a lifelong journey into wholeness, seeking harmony and balance in one's life, and learning to trust life. Most everyone can be considered to be on some form of healing journey in order to make themselves better in either a physical, mental, or emotional sense.

Wellness is a broad term that implies an active awareness of one's health and influences one's decision making to benefit their health. To lead a life of the highest quality, The University of California, Davis suggests that one's wellness can be examined in eight essential areas: occupational, emotional, spiritual, environmental, financial, physical, social, and intellectual. When even one of these areas is negatively influenced in one's life, it can impact their overall wellbeing. For example, it is clear that when one operates in a work environment that is unnecessarily demanding or stressful (decreased occupational wellness), it can influence almost every area of one's life: the situation is emotionally draining, financially stressing, can be physically tolling, socially limiting, and intellectually insulting.

Another way to look at wellness is through the eyes of Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute. He suggests that "wellness is a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential that is multidimensional and holistic, encompassing lifestyles, mental and spiritual well-being" (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.). Dr. Hettler offers the following "Six Dimensions of Wellness" diagram:

Created by Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute (1976)



Holistic healing and wellness in one's cancer journey calls us to look beyond the physical being and consider the well-being of the entire person and their environmental demands. An individual is so much more than a cancer diagnosis; we are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, uncles, siblings, teachers, and plumbers, etc. Individuals who have been diagnosed with cancer often have lives that have been shifted in the biggest earthquake they've ever experienced. We need care in all essences of our being, not just our physical being.

The purpose of this book is to highlight some techniques that I have personally found helpful in my healing and wellness journey. Whether your path to wellness involves having an experience with a cancer diagnosis or not, these techniques are applicable to a variety of situations that one may be facing. To each of these techniques, I have researched the academic literature that supports the technique's use, laying a foundation for its efficacy in practice.

## **Part Two: The Mind**

As I have learned throughout the course of my healing and wellness journey, the mind is a powerful tool that can influence us in ways not completely understood. As Bush (2006) states in the case of post-traumatic stress disorder in cancer survivors, “cancer often requires new skills and inner resources that the patient must learn at each step within each stage of the disease”. As Kris Carr, a cancer survivor and stage four thriver mentions, it is important to get a “check up from the neck up”!

Understanding one’s feelings, emotions, and internal thoughts influence healing and wellness, and recognizing which coping strategies are appropriate and sustainable to utilize is a significant step to take in a healing journey. In the PBS film, “The New Medicine,” it reveals that groundbreaking studies have proved that one’s emotional state have a very large influence on their physical state: pain, healing, and one’s ability to fight infections can be modified by altering their mental state of mind. Esther Sternberg, MD, research professor at American University, states that “emotions and disease are connected: disturbances of emotions can change your physical health, and physical disease can change your emotional health”. This statement warrants that we take a close look at our mind, its thoughts, its feelings, and its processes when entering on a healing journey.

### **Stress Management and Immune Functioning**

We all have heard that stress is not good for our bodies. Not only does stress cause us emotional suffering and anxiety; it can actually take a physiological toll on us! Our body has an intricate and complex immune system whose sole job it is to keep us healthy and from getting sick. Believe it or not, our mental state can influence how effective our immune system is at

identifying pathogens, viruses, and other foreign bodies that can cause us to become ill. In the case of cancer, a rogue cell with damaged DNA is developed in our body which then multiplies and can spread throughout the body. Our immune system has a role in identifying these “cells gone bad” and initiating a cascade of physiologic events that is designed to kill the cancer cell. Research has found that “stressors and depression are associated with the decreased cytotoxic T-cell and natural-killer-cell activities that affect processes such as immune surveillance of tumours” (Reiche, Nunes, & Morimoto, 2004). The same study suggests that “the incidence of cancer was increased in the parents of accident victims and in war-bereaved parents, compared to that in non-bereaved members of the population”. This data may suggest that increased stress and depression reduces immune system functioning, placing these individuals at a higher risk of disease and malignancies. Sullivan (1999) states that strengthening your immune system is an essential element of the fight against cancer.

The immune system also has a role in the surveillance of our DNA by catching genomic damage, or “mishaps”, that may occur. As we know, cancer is resultant of genetic mutation in a cell that causes it to continue dividing to no end. As quoted by Sullivan (1999), “malignant, or cancer, cells seem to have minds of their own, as they produce rapidly and without any pattern”. With a compromised immune system due to stress, one may assume that the immune system may not spot the damaged DNA as easily. A study of DNA repair found that “patients who were more depressed showed significantly worse repair of damage DNA than did their less depressed counterparts” (Kiecolt-Glaser, Stephens, Lipetz, Speicher, & Glaser, 1985).

Immunology researchers have taken this information regarding stress and immune functioning to determine whether one’s mental stressors would have an impact on the amount of time it would take for them to heal from a wound. Gouin and Kiecolt-Glaser (2011) examined



two groups: individuals in high stress environments who were caring for parents with Alzheimer's, and age-matched groups who were not undergoing the chronic stress of caring for a ill loved one. The results of the study found that the wounds from the non-stressed adults healed a whole nine days sooner than the wounds of the chronically stressed. The implications of this study suggest that stress and our physical healing are interconnected. This warrants further examination on how to better manage stress when placed in a very stressful situation, such as receiving a cancer diagnosis.

### **Stress Related to Social Rank and Disease Prevalence**

Psychosocial variables such as social rank can influence health outcomes. One study that suggested the relationships between social orders (upper class population held in high esteem vs. lower class populations) was conducted on baboons in Kenya. This study examined the overall health of high ranking baboons compared to low ranking baboons that are more apt to stress. As stated by Marmot and Sapolsky (2014), "A stressed primate will have similar physiological responses to those of a stressed human. They lend credence to our claim that psychosocial factors play a major role in generating the social gradient in health". Low ranking male baboons (theoretically equivalent to low socioeconomic status individual) was found to be at a higher risk for various illnesses such as poor stress response, heart disease, and atherosclerosis. Think about it: these baboons did not have access to fast food or cigarettes! Health disparities already created by social order can be exasperated by negative behaviors that can further detriment our health.

### **Okinawan Longevity**

On a southern island in Japan is a town called Okinawa where its citizens are known for living long, healthy, and purposeful lives. Okinawa has long been a culturally "hot spot" for

researchers looking at health and longevity. It has been proposed that the elements contributing to Okinawan's long span of healthy life are their primarily plant based diets and their daily physical activity that gets their whole body moving (not through exercise, but rather through gardening and caring for animals). Another interesting factor that promotes longevity is their universal vocabulary for their purpose in life, called their "Ikigai". Ikigai translates to "the reason why I wake in the morning". It is suggested that developing an internal vocabulary for one's purpose for living and abiding by this purpose throughout the course of one's day can contribute to longevity and health. As proposed by Ischida (2012), having a "purpose in life or 'ikigai' is an effective technique for coping with stress and could influence longevity". It could be assumed that everyone should develop a personal "ikigai" or reason for waking in the morning. Finding a word or phrase to attach to our perceived purpose in life can be a driving factor to keep fighting when it is hardest in a healing journey.

Hill and Turiano (2014) found that "purposeful individuals lived longer than their counterparts did during the 14 years after the baseline assessment, even when controlling for other markers of psychological and affective well-being" and "in other words, having a purpose in life appears to widely buffer against mortality risk across the adult years".

### **Journaling:**

Keeping a diary or journal is a common recommendation for people going through a challenge or obstacle. Journaling is effective as a stress and grief management tool because it provides a medium for reflection, meditative activity, and self-awareness (Charles, 2010).

Journaling has also been hypothesized to positively impact our physical well-being by strengthening our immune system! Psychology and researcher James Pennebaker at the University of Texas at Austin suggests that regular journaling strengthens cells of our immune

system called T-lymphocytes (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988). Journaling's positive benefits has been thought to help clarify thoughts and feelings, help an individual know themselves better, reduce stress, solve problems more effectively, and resolve disagreements with others or internally (Purcell, 2013)

Journaling can be seen as a window into someone's mind; words that are difficult to speak may be easier to write. Journaling gives individuals the opportunity to reflect on past thoughts, process them, and reflect upon their personal growth as time passes. Nothing is better than grabbing a cup of hot tea, snuggling up with a soft blanket and a cozy puppy dog, and decluttering a mind full of negative thoughts.

### **Physically burning your fears and sorrows**

Throughout my personal cancer journey, my family and I created a poster board that had all of the dates of my chemotherapies on it. After I would come home after chemotherapy infusions, I would take a large, black, permanent marker and cross off (or vigorously scribble out!) the date. This would show that I was one step closer to the end of my treatments. When the final chemo day finally arrived, I gathered with my closest family members and burned the poster!

This was a monumental moment for me, because it signified that chemotherapy was not to be a part of my apparent identity anymore. This crisis was a temporary situation and I had found myself over the largest hurdle. I saw the end in sight, which was a significant emotional release. As the poster and its ugly chemotherapy dates burned, I could see the ashes physically vanish into the wind, reminding me that my cancer journey was coming to an end as well.



### **Creating a Gratitude journal**

When faced with a cancer diagnosis, depression and anxiety is a very common experience. Negative thoughts, worried thoughts, and angry thoughts are often prevalent. It is so important to remember the good things during this healing process, because it is so easy to get overwhelmed in all of the negativity. Take some time to appreciate the beauty in the world around you by creating a gratitude journal.

Believe it or not, even in the face of cancer, there is a lot to appreciate and be grateful for. Carrying a physical reminder of the good in the world (when your personal world feels like it's falling apart) can be a powerful tool to change your mindset and perspective by creating a positive emotional environment. Professor Elaine Wethington of Cornell suggests, "managing one's emotions in a proactive way may be the most successful coping mechanism over time (Wethington, 2000). Gratitude, positive psychology, and strength-based wellness intervention has been found to improve well-being and happiness, promote social functioning, prosocial behaviors, and relationships satisfaction, as well as improve sleep quality and duration (Hutchinson & Young, 2012).

### **Kris Carr: “Emotional Metastasis”**

Although cancer is certainly no walk in the park, it is important to not let your diagnosis define who you are. This is much easier said than done; the diagnosis is often the first thing you think of upon waking in the morning, the main line of thought throughout your day, and often the thing that rests heavy on your mind while in bed. It is difficult to find stability in the midst of such an unsure situation. Wozniak and Izycki (2014) say that “patients and their relatives need to face the challenge of a life defined with uncertainty; treatment routines, the threat of recurrence or the failure of the treatment”. It is important to not let your emotions metastasize; do not let a diagnosis poison your entire world!

### **Reliable Information Sourcing**

One of the kindest things you can do for yourself when looking for information regarding your diagnosis is to only search credible and reliable sources of information. Many people turn to online chat room forums. These forums are often not mediated by professionals; they are rather a space for the general public to voice their opinions or experiences. As a result, frustrated and angry patients or family members will relate stories about negative experiences. This can be scary territory for the diagnosed individual and may lead them to believe that every “worse-case scenario” applies to them.

Some things to think about when searching for information online: what is the purpose of the website? Is the site sponsored by some corporation that may have alternative agendas, such as making profit by selling products? Are the links relevant to your situation? Where is the information coming from? Are there several ads or commercials on the website? Is research cited to scholarly journals? Does the information seem too good to be true?

Only trust information from .gov, .edu, or .org websites. Websites that end in .com are often for-profit companies that may have interest in persuading your opinion or selling you product. Some valuable organizations to obtain information from in regards to integrative, complementary, and alternative cancer treatments are:

- The National Institute of Health’s National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine: [nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov)
- The National Cancer Institute: [www.cancer.gov/cam](http://www.cancer.gov/cam)
- PubMed®: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)
- NIH Clinical Research Trials and You: [www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials/](http://www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials/)

### **Compassionate Acts**

Research has shown that doing compassionate acts for other individuals may provide individuals with the same endorphin releasing effects of eating or having sex. For this reason, it may be beneficial for cancer patients to engage in altruistic activities for others, such as providing emotional support for other cancer patients who are going through similar situations.

### **Mindfulness and Meditation**

There is considerable evidence that “mindfulness-based stress reduction, a type of meditation training, can help cancer patients relieve anxiety, stress, fatigue, and general mood and sleep disturbances, thus improving their quality of life” (Ledesma & Kumano, 2009).

Relaxation Podcasts: <https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/resources/podcasts/#.VSsdtnF-pB>

### **Guided Imagery and Visualization**

Blue Shield of California, an insurance company, conducted a trial of providing patients with guided imagery and visualization audio tapes prior to surgical procedures. Research is

suggesting that the patients who practice guided imagery before surgery tend to have shorter hospital stays and lower medication expenses. A \$17 dollar guided imagery CD saved the insurance company an average of \$2000 per surgery.

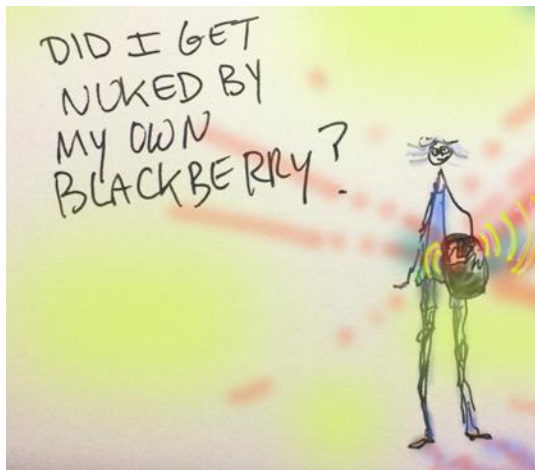
The same concepts behind guided imagery can be applied to visualization practice. For me, imagining a scene or picture in my mind and visualizing exploding cancer cells and melting tumors were helpful during chemotherapy infusions.

### **Malignant Humor!**

I have always had an appreciation for all types of humor, so using humor as a coping strategy in my healing and wellness journey has served me well. Research has shown that laughter will boost endorphin levels in the brain, delivering a feeling of happiness and well-being. “Humor promotes wellness, and wellness in turn promotes humor” (Salameh & Fry, 2001).

It is suspected that humor can be used to cope with negative thoughts and unhealthy behaviors as well. “There are elements in both wellness and humor that invite moderation and emotional maturity while attenuating obsessional thinking, rigid behavior, and extremeness of response” (Salameh & Fry, 2001). Laughter has been thought to decrease a cancer cell’s viability, or ability to thrive, by increasing the amount of oxygen brought to the cell. While the use of humor may not be helpful at the time of diagnosis, depending on the person, it can be helpful for use at various other points in one’s cancer journey. Health professionals must use humor with extreme caution, as humor can be taken offensively by patients if not delivered appropriately.

Because we can be considered our own expert, we tend to know which form of humor appeals to us most. Finding humor in various situations and expressively drawing them has been have an influence on one's wellness. Yaqub (2012) implies that drawing and self-expression of feelings regarding cancer experiences (which may be otherwise difficult to articulate) can have a soothing and freeing effect for patients. It "allows patients to have some control over their emotions and communicate their stories informally, helping individuals with cancer feel that they are not alone in what they are going through". Amy Marash of Washington, DC was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2009 and chose to develop a website called <http://cancerissofunny.blogspot.com/> to showcase the humor in her cancer experience. Below are some pictures of her drawings:



### **Examining Emotions**

Taking a close look at our emotions can lead us to insights about our mental wellbeing. Persistent negative emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, or anxiety can influence our overall wellbeing and may direct our healing journey down the wrong path. It has been hypothesized that our emotions surrounding a cancer diagnosis can be related to or influenced by how the initial diagnosis was presented, or how the bad news was delivered.



Throughout the course of my cancer journey, I was told time and time again to JUST THINK POSITIVE! While it is so important to encourage positive thoughts and to be there for individuals going through tough times, it is also natural to express negative feelings. The key is to not let these feelings persist to the point of spiraling out of control. “It is misguided and naïve to expect all cancer patients to be consistently positive, without being allowed to express feelings of sadness or anger, or giving themselves time to absorb and adapt to their experience. There may also be an implication of blaming the patient for not fighting hard enough if the disease continues to advance” (Barraclough, 1999).

### **Breath Work**

I have personally found breath work to be one of the most effective strategies to reducing stress and encouraging clarity of mind when faced with overwhelming situations that seem inescapable. Breath work encourages individuals to place their entire focus on how they are breathing, where they are breathing, for how long they are breathing, and what sounds they make while breathing. By focusing one’s attention on their breath, it allows them to re-center by taking the present moment for what it is, and not divulge into past or future thinking.

Amy Weintraub (2005) is a LifeForce Yoga practitioner who developed a breath work manual that is designed to have a calming and cooling effect. These “pranayamas” involved three parts: ujjayi or ocean-sound victory breaths, nadi sodhana or purifying breaths, and kumbhaka or retention breaths. Ujjayi or ocean sound breaths involve slightly constricting the back of your throat to make a wave like sound upon inhaling and exhaling. Nadi sodhana or purifying breaths involve breathing through alternate nostrils by way of lightly blocking the airflow out of one nostril during inhalation, and then releasing the blocked nostril to exhale. Kumbhaka or retention breathing involves sustaining the inhalation breath for four counts,

holding it for two counts, releasing the breath through exhalation for six counts, and then pausing for another two counts.

### **Coping Mechanisms for Stress Management in the Face of Adversity**

We all know that any medical diagnosis of any kind is a stressful situation. Medical intervention and uncertainty about the future is sure to bring about feelings of anxiety. In the face of anxiety, there are several avenues through which individuals will cope with these feelings. Some retreat into unhealthy and risky behaviors to alleviate their anxiety, while others will proactively face their feelings “Coping styles influences emotional adjustment to cancer. Patients who cope passively following their diagnosis, with high levels of avoidance and helplessness—hopelessness, are at increased risk of developing sustained anxiety or depression in the subsequent months” (Barracough, 1999). The application of coping mechanisms is influential in one’s wellbeing, acknowledging that “past studies have demonstrated relationships between coping processes and outcomes, such as stress reduction, disease incidence, and survival” (Hervatin, Sperlich, Koch-Giesselmann, & Geyer, 2011).

Ponton (2006) has suggested 20 coping mechanisms to help reduce stress and anxiety. These are active interventions to help alleviate anxiety symptoms even in the most stressful of situations.

1. Perform diaphragmatic or “deep breathing” exercises.
2. Lie face down on the floor and begin breathing deeply and slowly, with your hands resting under your face. Do this for five minutes.
3. Sit in a reclining chair. Put a hand on your abdomen and a hand on your chest. As you breathe, make sure the hand on your abdomen is moving up and down rather than one on your chest. If the hand on your abdomen is moving you are breathing deeply and slowly.

4. Try progressive muscle relaxation or “deep muscle” relaxation. Progressively tense and relax each muscle group in your body. Learn the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.
5. Meditate. Use visualization or guided imagery to help you learn to be one with your thoughts. Sit quietly with your eyes closed, imagining the sights, sounds and smells of your favorite place, such as a beach or mountain retreat.
6. Exercise regularly or take up yoga.
7. Consult a psychologist about the use of biofeedback.
8. Make time for music, art or other hobbies that help relax and distract you.
9. Learn to identify and monitor stressors. Come up with an organized plan for handling stressful situations. Be careful not to overgeneralize negative reactions to things.
10. Make a list of the important things you need to handle each day. Try to follow the list so you feel organized and on top of things. Put together a coping plan step by step so you have a sense of mastery.
11. Keep an eye on things that might suggest you’re not coping well. For example, are you smoking or drinking more, or sleeping less?
12. Keep a list of the large and little hassles in your day versus the major stressful events in your life. This helps you focus on the fact that you’re keeping track of and managing those as well as you can.
13. Set aside a time every day to work on relaxation.
14. Avoid using caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, junk food, binge eating and other drugs as your primary means for coping with stress. While they can be helpful once in a while, using them as your only or usual method will result in longer-term problems, such as weight problems or alcoholism.
15. Learn to just say, “No” occasionally. It won’t hurt other people’s feelings as much as you think and is simply a method to be more assertive in your own life, to better help you meet your own needs.

16. Get the right amount of sleep. For most people, this is seven to nine hours a night.
17. Cultivate a sense of humor; laugh.
18. Research has shown that having a close, confiding relationship protects you from many stresses.
19. Don't run from your problems! This only makes them worse.
20. Talk to your family and friends. See if they can help.

### **Part Three: The Body**

Nourishing your body with pure nutrition is of utmost importance in your healing and wellness journey. Every time we consume food or liquids, a chemical reaction and breakdown occurs in our body. My dietician once compared eating to “chemotherapy that we give ourselves three times a day”! Current research in the field of nutrition certainly suggests that it is entirely possible to fight disease with your fork. The question is: what does good nutrition look like? While this answer may be different for each unique individual, there is a general guideline that applies to most people in order to promote longevity and health throughout the lifespan.

Throughout the course of history, plants and herbs have been used for their medicinal values to treat a variety of ailments. Sweet potato was once used as a bowel regulator, elderberry root tea for bladder infections, chamomile for insomnia, ginger for nausea, and garlic for pain (Sullivan, 1999). These are just a few of the many uses that plants and herbs have served in primitive medicine. While the field of medicine has made many significant gains that have saved the lives of countless people, I do believe that there is still some efficacy of using natural herbs and plants in alleviating symptoms of various diseases or conditions.

In general, it is suggested our body’s cells become diseased when they “do not receive proper nutrition because of consumption of too much fat, or because foods are cooked at very high temperatures that change the structure of the cell wall” or when they “do not eliminate toxins effectively” (Sullivan, 1999). In the case of cancer, it is important to understand that there is no singular cause of malignancy. Sullivan (1999) has suggested that the cause of cancer is multifactorial; “genetics, radiation, and carcinogenic agents such as pesticides and asbestos all play a role in causing cancer”.

### **Before Making Changes to your Diet:**

As recommended by the American Cancer Society (Nutrition After Treatment Ends, 2014), please consider these suggestions for healthy eating after cancer treatment:

- Check with your doctor for any food or diet restrictions
- Ask your dietician to help you create a nutritious, balanced eating plan
- Choose a variety of foods from all the food groups. Use the American Cancer Society Guidelines for Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Survivors to help choose foods for a well-balance meal plan:

<http://www.cancer.org/healthy/eathealthygetactive/acsguidelinesonnutritionphysicalactivityforcancerprevention/>

- Try to eat at least five to seven servings a day of fruits and vegetables, including citrus fruits and dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables
- Eat plenty of high-fiber foods, such as whole grain breads and cereals
- Decrease the amount of fat in your meals by baking or broiling foods
- Avoid salt-cured, smoked, and pickled foods
- Drink alcohol only occasionally if you choose to drink

### **Prevention is the Best Cure**

The American Cancer Society suggests that approximately one third of cancer deaths may be related to poor nutrition and limited activity (Diet and Physical Activity, 2015). Making positive lifestyle changes is essential to longevity regardless of whether one has been diagnosed with cancer or not. By making lifestyle changes to incorporate healthy behaviors after a cancer

diagnosis, one can positively influence their outcome, their life expectancy, and their quality of life.

### **Nutrition: Fight Disease with your Fork**

Dr. Michael Greger, MD and preventative medicine doctor of Nutritionfacts.org has suggested through his extensive literature review and nutritional research that whole food, plant based diets may help prevent, treat, slow, and even reverse cancer progression. Eating a diet that meets the minimum daily requirements for fruits and vegetables can be considered “chemopreventive” or influential in the inhibition of cancer progression. “Chemoprevention is described as the use of natural or synthetic chemicals allowing suppression, retardation, or inversion of carcinogenesis” (Kelloff et al., 1994). In general, societies that eat a diet rich in plant based foods have traditionally lower cancer rates across the board. Countries such as Gambia, Yemen, and Nepal have the lowest cancer death rates across the world, where countries such as the United States, France, and Denmark have the highest cancer death rates.

It is easier to tell people what to include in their diet, rather than what to exclude. Including a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, beans/ legumes, whole grains, nuts, and seeds into one’s diet can provide them with the most immune support possible to ward off rogue cancer cells. Evidence that supports the consumption of a primarily plant-based diet points to several mechanisms that may prevent cancer. When diets are high in plant forage or fiber, it helps the body to rid itself of excess hormones that may drive hormone linked cancers such as prostate or breast cancer. Colorful fruits and vegetables contain a plethora of antioxidants and phytochemicals that work to intercept carcinogens. A diet rich in color, vegetables, and antioxidant containing foods has been shown to reduce the risk of an individual developing Non-

Hodgkin's Lymphoma (Kelemen et al., 2006). Eating a plant based diet serves to lower methionine levels intake, which "many human cancer cell lines and primary tumors have absolute requirements for methionine" (Cellarier et al., 2003). Including high nutrition fruits and vegetables into one's diet may inhibit angiogenesis which serves to hook blood vessels up to malignant tumor cells, feeding their growth and invasion throughout the body (Angiogenesis, 2015).

### **Fruits**

**Apples:** The peel is particularly high in triterpenoids, which has anticancer potential in its anti-inflammatory, anti-proliferative, and pro-apoptotic effects (Patlolla & Rao, 2012)

**Black raspberries:** block DNA damage; research has shown that "administration of berries or berry components effectively inhibit chemically-induced tumor formation in several animal models of experimental oral carcinogenesis" (Casto, Knobloch, & Weghorst, 2011)

**Blueberries:** the phytochemical that gives blueberries their color is called anthocyanin, which has antioxidant effects, promotes activation of phase II detoxifying enzymes, anti-proliferative activity toward multiple cancer cell types, induces apoptosis (programmed cell death) in cancer cells, anti-inflammatory effects, anti-angiogenic properties, anti-invasiveness, and induction of differentiation of malignant cells from normal cells (Wang & Stoner, 2008)

**Cranberries:** include flavonoids, anthocyanins, proanthocyanidins, and flavonols. These phytochemicals serve to inhibit growth and proliferation of tumor cells in vitro through



the induction of apoptosis and “inhibition of events linked to cellular invasion and migration” (Neto, 2011).

**Grapes:** resveratrol found in the skin of red and purple grapes has the potential to “slow the growth of cancer cells and inhibit the formation of tumors in lymph, liver, stomach, and breast cells; resveratrol has also triggered the death of leukemic and colon cancer tumors while blocking the development of skin, breast and leukemia cancers at all three stages of disease, being initiation, promotion, and progression” (Foods that fight, 2011)

**Strawberries:** A phase two clinical trial for patients with precancerous lesions of the esophagus investigated the effect of strawberries on the lesions. Patients ate over a pound of fresh strawberries everyday over the course of six months, and the “progression of disease was reversed in 80% of the high dose strawberry treatment” (Chen et al., 2012)

### **Vegetables**

**Broccoli, Broccoli Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Brussel sprouts:** brassica and cruciferae family vegetables. “Vegetables of the Cruciferae family influence carcinogenesis during initiation and promotion phases of cancer development” (Murillo & Mehta, 2001). Broccoli and broccoli sprouts are high in the compound sulphorophane, which has been found to alter cell’s susceptibility to cancer causing agents, influence cell cycle processes, promote apoptosis to malignant cells, decrease angiogenesis and invasion, as well as inhibit metastasis and cancer cell growth. Studies have confirmed sulphorophane’s ability to inhibit a variety of cancer cell lines such as bladder, breast, colon, lung, pancreas, prostate, skin, and stomach (Veeranki, Bhattacharya, Marshall, & Zhang, 2013).

**Sweet potato:** the main protein found in sweet potatoes has been identified as a protease inhibitor that could have cancer-fighting properties (Li, 2013)

**Garlic:** garlic is a part of the allium family, and shares this spot with onions, scallions, leeks, and chives. Garlic has been found to have a profound impact on various cancer strains. Trio et al., 2014) has deduced that the organosulfur compounds found in garlic are revealed to be responsible for lowering the risk of esophageal, stomach, and prostate cancers. Fortunately, there are no known aversive side effects to the consumption of garlic and its beneficial alicin compounds, other than potentially losing a few friends from smelly breath!

### **Whole Grains**

**Quinoa:** saponins found in quinoa can be used to address the prevention and treatment of inflammation by suppressing the release of inflammatory cytokines, which may be a contributing factor to cancer (Yao, Yang, Shi, & Ren, 2014)

**Whole Wheat:** orthophenol is a powerful antioxidant in whole wheat that in combination with whole wheat's fiber content, can reduce the risk of developing cancer (Harvest of Hope, 2002)

### **Beans and Legumes**

**Black Beans:** black beans contain an impression number of phytates, which “reduces cell proliferation, assists differentiation of malignant cells, enhances immunity, and contributes antioxidant properties to facilitation tumor cell destruction” (Vacenik & Shamsuddin, 2006).

**Lentils:** Lentils are a great way of increasing fiber intake, which has the potential to lower colon and breast cancer risk as found in research by Dong, He, Wang, & Qin (2011).

### **Nuts and Seeds**

**Walnuts:** a unique omega-3 fat called alphanolenic acid (ALA) found in walnuts prevent cell proliferation, fight inflammation, and has been found to slow breast cancer tumor growth in a trial of mice (Walnuts slow growth, 2008).

**Flax seeds:** lignans found in flax seeds have been shown to reduce prostate and breast cancer risk (Saarinen, Wärrä, Airio, Smeds, & Mäkelä, 2007)

**Chia seeds:** chia seeds are nutrient dense and very high in fiber, with one ounce contributing close to 10 grams of dietary fiber. This fiber may play a part in reducing the risks of certain cancers, including colon cancer.

### **Other Foods**

**Turmeric:** The compound called curcumin in turmeric makes this food a potent anti-cancer food. Turmeric influences gene expression through blocking cancer causing mutagenic compounds, can help reprogram cancer cell death through promoting apoptosis, and reduce inflammatory cancer microenvironments; “curcumin [found in turmeric] fulfills the ideals chemopreventive agent with its low toxicity, affordability, and easy accessibility” (Park, Amin, Chen, & Shin, 2013).

**Mushrooms:** Reishi, white button mushrooms, maitake, and chaga mushrooms can “affect cancer through immunomodulation resulting in tumor destruction or can have an

effect on the tumor directly. The immune-stimulating impact that mushrooms can exert on natural killer cells, macrophages, and T cells can also provide a protective effect against chemotherapeutic myelosuppression [anemia, fatigue, bleeding risk, vessel fragility]” (Guggenheim, Wrist, & Zwickey, 2014)

### **Physical activity**

Physical activity has been heavily documented to show its positive impact on cancer prevention and survival after diagnosis (Clague & Bernstein, 2012). When many people think of physical activity, they often think of rigorous training schedules, lifting weights, or preparing for marathons. This simply does not have to be so. Physical activity entails any form of active movement, not just physical training. Physical activity could involve any purposeful or meaningful time spent in the garden, taking a leisurely stroll, or walking the dog. Research has consistently shown that “the health benefits of participating in regular physical activity are well-documented, and include reductions in risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, depression, fatigue, and overall mortality” (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996).

In regards to cancer prevention, exercise has been shown to reduce the risks for the following cancers: breast, colon, endometrial, ovarian, prostate, and lung cancer (Friedenreich & Orenstein, 2002). Results of one study indicate that post-diagnosis physical activity is associated with a 46–49 % reduction in all-cause mortality among prostate cancer survivors and a 61 % reduction in prostate cancer-specific mortality (Kenfield, Stampfer, Giovannucci, & Chan, 2011).

A study conducted by Barnard, Gonzalez, Liva, and Ngo (2006) investigated the breast cancer risk factors (estrogen, obesity, insulin, and insulin-like growth factor-I) in obese, post-menopausal women and exercise programs. They examined what difference diet and exercise could make in these women's cancer defenses, or physiological abilities to induce cancer cell apoptosis (cell death). These women were eating a primarily plant based diet and engaged in 30-60 minute walks every day. Researchers found that the blood of those eating a healthy plant based diet with light to moderate exercise was significantly more effective at inducing apoptosis in cancer cells than those who at the standard American diet with vigorous exercise. Other rationale behind why good diet and purposeful activity are effective in reducing cancer risk include: "heightening immune surveillance, reducing inflammation, increasing endogenous antioxidant enzyme systems, increasing insulin sensitivity, controlling growth factor production and activation, decreasing obesity and central adiposity, optimizing DNA repair capacity, and reducing oxidative stress" (Anzuini, Battistella, & Izzotti, 2011).

### **Rebounding and Lymphatic System Health**

Rebounding is an aerobic exercise that involves jumping on a mini trampoline. This rhythmic form of low impact exercise has a variety of health benefits, including stimulation of the lymphatic system. It has been suggested that rebounding can increase the level of endorphins in our brain, which may reduce stress and promote the potential for relaxation responses.

Rebounding stimulates healing and cleansing, and can be used as an exercise that is extremely beneficial to those who have suppressed immune systems, including those diagnosed with cancer. Rebound author and lecturer Linda Brooks notes rebounding two minutes every hour "is the ideal protocol for defense against cancer; in just two minutes the entire lymphatic

system is flushed." The white blood cell count nearly triples, providing a greater defense system to destroy cancer cells. (Wellman, 2003)

### **Chronic Inflammation**

Chronic inflammation may play a part in contributing to cancer development. "Several immune protumor effector mechanisms are upregulated by chronic inflammation, leading to the hypothesis that inflammation promotes carcinogenesis and tumor growth by altering the balance between protumor and antitumor immunity, thereby preventing the immune system from rejecting malignant cells, and providing a tumor-friendly environment for progressive disease" (Ostrand- Rosenberg, 2008). There is considerable research suggesting that "inflammation favors carcinogenesis, malignant transformation, tumor growth, invasion, and metastatic spread" (Multhoff, Molls, & Radons, 2012). For this reason, nutrition and exercise play an even more important role in reducing the effects of inflammation in the body.

### **Risky Behaviors after Remission in Young Adults**

It is important to note that there is some evidence to support that young adults who have achieved cancer remission may be more prone to divulging in risky behaviors such as smoking or drug use. This rationale stems from potential feelings of "invincibility" that some young adults may feel after conquering a life threatening disease. Healthy behaviors such as proper nutrition and adequate exercise should be promoted in this age group and not bypassed simply because of their age.

## **Part Four: The Spirit**

One's spiritual journey can be a process of finding a connection for something outside of ourselves while incorporating our beliefs and values. Spirituality can also include the path to finding meaning in life and experiencing life's journey completely and consciously as a spiritual being. Some find a connection to a higher being or purpose, and this may or may not include religion or some other form of worship. When spiritually out of touch, some may mention that they feel disconnected from the universe or from their "true selves", as well as feeling unbalanced or lost in life's journey. "Spiritual elements are those capacities that enable a human being to rise above or transcend any experience at hand. They are characterized by the capacity to seek meaning and purpose, to have faith, to love, to forgive, to pray, to meditate, to worship, and to seek beyond present circumstances (Aldridge, 2000).

Reaching a balance in one's life involves connecting with the spirit, affirming our direction, and trusting ourselves to make room for kindness and all that is good. In order to support our highest intentions, we must take some time to reconnect with ourselves in the hectic world that we live in. Taking time to meditate, practice Yoga, and reconnect with your central purpose is beneficial to one's healing journey, particularly cancer patients who are entering a new chapter of their lives upon diagnosis. .

### **Create an Altar**

In creating a personal altar, one can choose for this space to have religious attachment or not. This is a personal space to "drop off your luggage" and reconnect with your core being on a very deep and personal level. Some choose to decorate their altars with fabrics and cloths, power bowls filled with meaningful objects or gifts, photos of fond memories or loved ones, sentimental cards, candles, crystals, bells, prayer beads, or meditation cushions/ pillows. This

altar is meant to be a sacred and cherished place to center on yourself, refocus on your healing, and connect with your inner spiritual being.

## **Rituals**

According to Jeanne Achterberg, Ph.D, author of “Rituals of Healing: Using Imagery for Health and Wellness,” (1994), rituals are:

- Entering into a sacred space of mind
- Honoring the core of our humanity
- Recognition of the power of the invisible forces that heal and connect and transcend
- Visible expressions of community bonding and support through biological and psychological passages of life
- Rites of separation from old ways of being and thinking and behaving, and integrating into new modes of living
- Communication and celebration, solemnity, and occasions for deep inner silence
- The ways all societies give meaning, richness, and structure to life
- Healing ceremonies

Rituals can be used to signify one’s healing journey and can be undertaken as a personal ritual or a social one. Rituals can be used to signify the end of one’s cancer journey as well as to signify a passage from old unhealthy habits to new disease preventing ones.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is a way to get outside of oneself and connect to a higher power or meaning.

Prayer can be religious or non-religious. As Reverend Dr. Thayer Greene said, “Prayer is an honest conversation with the ground of your being”. Kris Carr, author of “Crazy, Sexy, Cancer Survivor” mentions, prayer is an “inner sanctum where you and your God high-five and catch up like old buds” (Carr, 2008). Prayer is a very personal experience that means something different to everyone, and can be used as a powerful tool to gain purpose and meaning behind life’s struggles.



## **Your Mind on Meditation**

Mindfulness entails “observing sights, sounds, and other sensations, including internal bodily sensations and thoughts, without being carried away by them” (Ricard, Lutz, & Davidson, 2014). Through meditating, we can turn our attention to one point of reference, reducing distractive and intruding thoughts that leave us frustrated and stressed.

Ricard, Lutz, and Davidson (2014) propose that “meditation training increases one’s ability to better control and buffer basic physiological responses—inflammation or levels of a stress hormone”. It is suggested that “depressed patients can use meditation to manage negative thoughts and feelings as they arise spontaneously and so lessen rumination”.

Telomeres are stretches of DNA at the end of a chromosome. These “caps” are like the plastic tips at the end of shoelaces; as we age, telomeres tend to shorten which can lead to genetic coding mishaps and increased cellular aging. Telomeres can also shorten due to stress and lifestyle choices such as obesity and poor nutrition. Meditation can actually help inhibit length of shortening and may actually help regenerate telomere material. It has been concluded that “some forms of meditation may have salutary effects on telomere length by reducing cognitive stress and stress arousal and increasing positive states of mind and hormonal factors that may promote telomere maintenance” (Epel, Daubenmier, Moskowitz, Folkman, & Blackburn, 2009)

## **Affirmations**

Affirmations are positive statements that are spoken out loud, such as “I am healing. I am not alone. I am strong and supported. I am going to live. I am becoming well.” Affirmations are often goal driven: common are statements of healing, of peace, of success, of understanding.

When verbally stated into the world, affirmations help to negate or to compete with negative internal thoughts that are often automatic yet not necessarily true. Affirmations can serve to energize our mind's eye by inspiring mental images that can influence our beliefs and behaviors.

Here is an example of a cancer fighting affirmation/ mantra from Dr. Jameth Sheridan:

Start out with reality and get your body on your side: "BODY, things are not going well. I have cancer, and we are dying. There is a tumor inside of us, that is pretending to be part of us, and it is trying to kill us. We've seen this before though... we have killed cancer cells all of our life and if we don't do something about it, we are going to die. You and I, me and my body, we are one. We are DYING. We've got to control this, we need to understand what is happening.

This all may be true, but we can BEAT this fight. We can win it, but we need to work together to recognize what it is. I need you, body, to recognize what this is, and I'm going to do everything on my end to help you recognize what it is. I'm going to eat foods and substances, dietary regimes, sun, and exercise, do everything to help you see it on your radar. Once my body recognizes that I have cancer, it will eat it up voraciously with a strong immune system. The only problem is that my body cannot see it right now.

Give the cancer an ultimatum! Cancer, I am COMING AFTER YOU. I am coming to get you. Your days are numbered, and you are going down. I am going to win this, I am working on perfect health, and my body is healing. The cancer that is temporarily residing in my body is leaving because I am healing. I am on a journey and an epic battle, and I will win".

## **Yoga**

Yoga is a hot topic in the field of health and wellness. More and more individuals are turning to yoga practices to increase their physical wellbeing and to promote clarity of mind.

Research suggests that “mind-body therapies, such as yoga, can support pharmacological and psychological therapies by improving autonomic responses to stress and self-regulating coping behaviors” (Kinser, Goehler, & Taylor, 2012). This low impact exercise can be really helpful to restore spiritual purpose and mental clarity in individuals currently undergoing cancer treatment, as well as those who are embarking on survivorship journeys.

## **Part Five: Healing Relationships**

### **What are the elements of a healing relationship?**

Perez (2004) argues that the following characteristics are elements of a healing relationship:

H-Hopeful, being optimistic about the future

E-Empathetic, identify with feelings and thoughts of others

A-Attentive, being in the present moment and attending to immediate needs

L-Loving, demonstrating concern and care for others

I-Intentional, being purposeful and deliberate with one's words and actions

N-Nourishing, promoting strength and fostering healing and wellness

G-Grateful, thankful and appreciating kindness and generosity

I have personally found that hopeful, empathetic, loving, and nourishing qualities in friends and family to be the most refreshing in my healing journey. Sometimes we just need to hear that everything will be alright and that they are there for us at all times.

### **Develop a Healing Posse**

Cancer can be an experience that brings people together, but it can also feel like a very isolating and lonely experience. A diagnosis can mean loss in a variety of avenues: for some, it means loss of independence, loss of friends or relationships, loss of well-being, loss of hair, loss of roles or positions, loss of strength and physical integrity, loss of life expectancy, or a loss of control. "There is some evidence that younger patients suffer more emotional distress, which makes intuitive sense because young ones have more to lose. Besides the prospect of a severely curtailed life expectancy, they face being denied many of the experiences which most people

take for granted: pursuing a career, getting married, having children, and seeing them grow up” (Barraclough, 1999).

Developing in “healing posse”, complete with family members, close friends, doctors, fitness instructors, other cancer survivors, and virtual friends can make the experience seem much less lonely when you need support. These are individuals that you know you can count on to have your best interest at heart; they are there to facilitate your personal growth, support you through the tough times, and be a shoulder to cry on when needed. There can never be too many people in your healing posse... the more the merrier!

### **Seeking and Accepting Help**

I am sure that I would not have made it through my cancer journey without the support and help of the wonderful friends and family in my life. It is so very important to not be shy to ask for help when it is needed, or to delegate tasks unto other people. It is common to feel as though you are burdening others with your problems or chores, but people who love and support you will be more than happy to assist when needed. One the best gifts someone can give is kindness and so many people are willing to give it to no end.

## Conclusion

It is my hope that this healing and wellness guide will serve others in their pursuit of reaching optimal health in the realms of mind, body, and spirit. This e-book is compilation of research that I completed in a time of my life that very uncertain and scary. I was desperate to find any way to achieve health and wellness; Luckily, I found a multitude of individuals who were in similar positions as I, as well as stories from others who were now past their medical dilemmas. This information has provided me with immeasurable benefits as I relearned what it meant to be well. I made the personal decision to redefine what it meant to take care of and nourish myself in a holistic sense, which has suited me well in my healing journey. As with every journey, there are ups and downs along the way. Now on the other side of my medical dilemma, I can appreciate my experience for what it was and have used it grow in a number of ways. As Kathy Kinney said, “One day she finally grasped that unexpected things were going to happen in life. And with that she realized the only control she had was how she chose to handle them. So, she made the decision to survive using courage, humor, and grace. She was the queen of her own life and the choice was hers”. I wish you the very best in your healing and wellness journey.

Tiffany Bystra, OTS

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**Helpful Healing and Wellness Resources:**

American Cancer Society

American Institute for Cancer Research

A Daybook of Positive Thinking: Blue Mountain Arts

Kris Carr, author of “Crazy, Sexy, Diet”

Michael Greger, MD of Nutrition facts.org

Dr. Joel Fuhrman, author of “Super Immunity”

Neal Barnard, MD and founder of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

Dr. Leigh Connealy of the Center for New Medicine

“Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Cancer Survivors” document

“Affirmations for Getting Well Again” with O. Carl Simonton M.D.

“The New Medicine” PBS Feature Film

William Li’s TED Talk: “Can We Eat to Starve Cancer?”