

# Healthy Behaviors

## What are healthy behaviors?

Treatment for cancer can be very hard on your body. Living a healthy lifestyle is especially important for cancer survivors. Good nutrition, exercise and other healthy behaviors may help your body heal from the physical harm cancer and its treatment may have caused. If you think healthy behaviors may help you feel better during your survivorship, you might want to consider creating a self-care plan.

A self-care plan is something you can develop with members of your health care team. It provides practical ideas for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Everyone's self-care plan may include different diets and different activities. However, all self-care plans should include choices in daily activities that support a healthy lifestyle. A good self-care plan may improve your quality of life and may lower your risk for illnesses, including cancer and heart disease.

Four parts of a self-care plan are:

- Physical activity
- Nutritional recommendations
- Stress reduction
- Medical care

Each survivor is different and therefore each self-care plan is different. It's extremely important that you consult with your health care team and discuss your medical history when developing a self-care plan.

Some healthy behaviors that a self-care plan may include:

Physical activity

- Breathing exercises
- Walking
- Hiking
- Running
- Cycling
- Swimming or water aerobics
- Gardening and outdoor work
- Playing sports you enjoy
- Dance or movement classes

### Nutritional recommendations

- Eating five to seven servings daily of fruits and vegetables
- Eating plenty of fiber
- Eating enough fat - up to 20% of your total calories per day
- Drinking eight to ten glasses of water per day
- Avoiding salted, pickled or smoked foods
- Not eating a lot of red meats
- Not smoking
- Drinking little or no alcohol

### Stress reduction activities

- Doing things you find fun and that make you laugh
- Doing things that make you feel relaxed
- Taking classes - like music, painting or other hobbies
- Writing in a journal
- Praying and meditating
- Attending support groups or counseling

### Medical care

- Taking your medications as directed
- Having regular medical follow-up
- Knowing what symptoms to look for and when to contact a member of your health care team

If you are living with a disability from cancer or its treatments, activities that promote wellness and health in your life after cancer may be totally different from what you did before cancer. Even with physical limitations, there are still things you can do to maximize your health. It may mean learning new ways to do the things you enjoy. You might want to consider discussing with your doctor ways to maximize your health and incorporate changes in your body into your self-care plan.

## **Who benefits from healthy behaviors?**

Many cancer survivors find that they feel better if they incorporate healthy behaviors into their daily routine. It's important to remember that not everyone's healthy behaviors are going to be the same. Eating right for your health needs and including some exercise that relates to your recovery needs may improve how you feel. It may also reduce your risk for cancer and other major health problems.

Some of the major risk factors for cancer are:

- Not getting the nutrition your body needs
- Being overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Using tobacco products
- Spending too much time in the sun without protection

A good self-care plan may help you avoid these risks. You should ask your health care team about your particular risk factors so you know what things you should avoid.

## **When are healthy behaviors important?**

Even if you feel fine after your cancer treatment ends, you can still benefit from incorporating healthy behaviors into your daily routine. Survivors who experience physical changes like weakness or changes in their weight after cancer may be more likely to discuss healthy behaviors with their health care team. But all survivors can benefit from learning what healthy behaviors are good for them during their survivorship.

Healthy behaviors may help some survivors who experience:

- Weakness
- Loss of balance
- Fatigue
- Stiff muscles and joints
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Problems sleeping
- Restlessness

There is no guarantee that healthy behaviors will cure or prevent possible aftereffects from treatment. However, healthy behaviors may make you feel like you are doing as much as you can to improve how well you feel on a daily basis. If physical problems still affect you after you have been following your self-care plan for a while, there may be other treatment options that will help you. This doesn't mean you should stop having a self-care plan. It may mean that you and your health care team need to make some adjustments to your self-care plan or that you receive other medicines or treatments that become part of your self-care plan.

## **What are ways that survivors can incorporate healthy behaviors into their lifestyle?**

- Talk to your health care team about what diet and exercise plan are best for your recovery needs
- Establish some long-term goals and also set realistic and specific short-term goals to include more healthy behaviors in your life
- Explore the different ways you can manage stress in your daily life

### **Works Cited**

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