

Lifelines

from the National Cancer Institute



Enhancing Life after Cancer Treatment

By the National Cancer Institute

The end of cancer treatment is often a time to rejoice. Cancer survivors are relieved to have finished the demands of treatment and are ready to put the experience behind them. Yet at the same time, cancer survivors may feel sad and nervous. Leaving the routine of medical care can be an adjustment. And it's common to be confused about follow-up care, what steps to take after treatment, and to worry if the cancer will come back. These issues, along with many other concerns faced by cancer survivors, are addressed in *Facing Forward: Life after Cancer Treatment*, a booklet in a National Cancer Institute publication series dedicated to helping cancer survivors.

According to Traci, a 39-year-old cancer survivor, trying to get her body back to normal after cancer treatment was the hardest part. She experienced a lack of energy and stamina and was also dealing with excessive worry. Her greatest concern was whether the cancer would return.

In December 2006, Traci received treatment for stage I breast cancer after detecting a lump during a self-exam. She had a lumpectomy — a type of surgery that removes the breast tumor (lump) and some of the normal tissue around it — followed by radiation and chemotherapy. The treatment took about six months. During the year after her treatment she experienced extreme fatigue.

Like all cancer survivors, Traci has had to adjust to her life after cancer treatment. Many people call this a “new normal.” She has learned to cope by focusing on the joy in life. “If you don't feel completely like you did before,” Traci said, “find a way that fulfills you to get whatever you need.”

Facing Forward: Life after Cancer Treatment suggests ways to improve the quality of life for cancer survivors like Traci. For example, moderate exercise (walking, biking or swimming) for at least 30 minutes each day can reduce anxiety and depression; improve mood and boost self-esteem; and reduce fatigue, nausea, pain, and diarrhea. It's important to start exercising slowly (such as three times a week) and increase activity over time, working with your doctor or a specialist if needed. Most survivors find that exercise actually helps in the management of fatigue after treatment, helping to overcome their concern about lack of stamina.

Making healthy food choices is also important, including a balanced diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals. Foods low in fat and salt are also recommended. Talk with your doctor or a nutritionist to discuss any special dietary needs that you may have.

Communicating with your doctor, family members, and coworkers can be hard. Many people find it helpful to be with others who have had similar cancer experiences. Some research shows that joining a support group improves quality of life and may even enhance survival.

There are many sources to turn to for help and guidance to learn to live life as a cancer survivor. By visiting the National Cancer Institute's Web site (www.cancer.gov) or calling the free Cancer Information Service (1-800-4-CANCER), you can access a wide variety of information that will educate you and improve your awareness about survivorship issues. For more information on the publication *Facing Forward: Life after Cancer Treatment*, please visit <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/life-after-treatment.pdf> or call the free Cancer Information Service (1-800-4-CANCER) to ask for this booklet. You will also find other informative and free materials on the NCI Web site by clicking on Quick Links/NCI Publications.

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI Web site at www.cancer.gov or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

Related resources:

- Facing Forward: Life After Cancer Treatment (www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/life-after-treatment)
- Facing Forward: Ways You Can Make a Difference in Cancer (www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/make-a-difference)
- Facing Forward: When Someone You Love Has Completed Cancer Treatment (www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/facing-forward-when-someone-you-love-has-completed-cancer-treatment)