

Breast Cancer Survival Center

Providing Post-Treatment Support and Education

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www.breastcancersurvival.org

Survive and Thrive: Tips For Surviving Breast Cancer

By Sheryl Kraft

Coming Events

Support/Discussion Groups 2006

June 13, 27
September 12, 26
October 10, 24
November 14, 28
December 12

Special Speaker

Michelle Bartlett
Nutritionist
May 23

Fairfield County Women's Center,
Room 116, West Campus
Norwalk Community College
5:30 p.m.

Weekend Retreat for Breast Cancer Survivors

June 2, 3, 4, 2006
Mercy Center, Madison, CT

One-day Retreat for Young Survivors

July 15, 2006
St. Paul's Church on the Green,
Norwalk

Seventh Annual Celebrate Life! Fashion Show and Brunch,

October 1, 2006
Shore and Country Club
East Norwalk, CT

Breast Cancer Awareness Month Candle Lighting Ceremonies

October 2006

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www.breastcancersurvival.org.

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Hearing the diagnosis of breast cancer changes your life forever. But being a survivor needn't completely take over your life. You're still you, after all. There are ways to make things easier for yourself.

Here are the most important lessons learned during 17 years as a cancer survivor. They can apply to anyone who has been diagnosed with a serious illness.

Set A Time Limit On Your Worrying. It's easy to let worrying about cancer consume all else...but dwelling on it drains you emotionally and physically. Instead, allow yourself 15 minutes a day to think about your fears - and no more. Set an alarm clock, if necessary, to time yourself. It requires great discipline to stop at the bell. It also takes discipline to start - it's common to fear releasing these feelings.

Keep Exercising. Or start, with your doctor's okay. Don't expect peak performance, but do something. Exercise can be a great diversion and a reaffirmation that you're going to be okay. It also helps counter the side effects of chemotherapy, and gives you a serotonin boost. This neurotransmitter helps you overcome depression and fatigue. During my treatment, I continued my regimen of aerobics classes, bike riding and walking on a treadmill, but at lower levels. It's amazing how good I felt after each session.

Eat Your Best. Eat fruits and vegetables. Drink fresh juice and lots of water. This is common sense, but when you are recovering from cancer, you may not pay attention. You owe it to yourself to enjoy healthful pleasures. Eating well gave me a feeling of mastery - I was doing good things for myself. That heightened my commitment to well-being and health.

Inspire Yourself. Before I was diagnosed with cancer, my enjoyment of simple things, like new buds on the trees in the spring, was not as intense. After cancer, the signs of life around me seemed like an extension of my own health.

Empower Yourself. Visualizing positive metaphors lends a feeling of control and eases the stress of recovery. When I was in treatment and riding my bike, each time the pedal went around, I would imagine another cancer cell being stomped out.

Look Ahead. Give yourself something to look forward to. Plan a vacation or family event. Tell yourself, "I'm going to get through this so I can (...)" Fill in your goal.

Look Outward. Support groups are not for everyone, but give them a try. Cancer survivors form a special bond. You can learn a lot from the creative ways other survivors have found to cope. Different people show up at different meetings, so attend a few sessions before deciding whether a support group will work for you.

Enjoy Ordinary Pleasures. Survivors often go into depression and forget the fun in their lives. Don't! Instead, see a funny movie and laugh. When I'm alone, I like to put on disco music and dance. Doing something unexpected can jolt you into a healthier state of mind.

When you were in treatment, someone was always looking after you. When treatment ends, pent-up stress and fear can tumble out. You may still need help and support.

Sheryl Kraft, a Wilton, CT, resident and professional writer, is a board member of the Breast Cancer Survival Center. This article first appeared in Bottom Line/Personal.