Survivorship Self-Care

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What is “Survivorship”? Living with, though, and beyond a cancer diagnosis.

- National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS), 1986
Why Self-Care?

- Cancer takes a toll on everyone involved.
- Cancer is a marathon, not a sprint.
- It’s not ‘over’ when it’s over.
- We have to put on ‘our own oxygen mask first’ if we hope to help anyone else.

The bottom line: To maintain quality of life, we all have to practice self care.
Quality of Life in Survivorship: 4 Areas of Focus  (Ferrell, 1996)

• **Physical:** Symptom relief and function

• **Psychological:** Sense of control, positive life changes, addressing fear and distress

• **Social:** Roles and relationships

• **Spiritual:** Finding hope and meaning
Physical Self-Care

• Fatigue
  – For most people, this improves but may not go away. It can come and go, but should not get worse over time.
  – **Exercise** is actually the ‘treatment’ for fatigue!
  – Many resources: Livestrong at the Y, Team Survivor NW, walk with a friend, yoga, water walking, resistance bands, light weights, Physical Therapy, even YouTube
  – Set a **goal**, write it down, and **get moving**!
Psychological Self-Care

• Living with uncertainty
  – Normal to have many different reactions to a stressful and life threatening event
  – Common: Fear, worry, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and more
  – **Control** what is in your control: Make healthy choices, write out a bucket list and work through it, do “legacy work”, seek reliable information and support, *ask for what you need*
Social Self-Care

• Connecting with others
  – It is normal to feel differently about what is important to do during and after cancer
  – Tendency to withdraw, isolate, feel fearful, sad, or angry
  – **Be honest** about what you are or are not doing and *why you are making that choice*
  – Seek **reasonable solutions** to try to connect with others. Ask for **physical and psychological supports** if these are needed
Spiritual Self-Care

• Loss of hope and meaning
  – Common to feel overwhelmed, like giving up, stuck, misunderstood, and helpless

  – **Resilience** helps meaning finding: *Being able to experience both positive and negative emotions in distressing situations*

  – **Gratitude** is the the quality of being thankful: *Readiness to show appreciation and return kindness promotes hope and wellbeing*
Practicing Resilience

– Being willing to learn from hardship
  • Post-traumatic growth
– Participating in kindness
  • Receiving and giving
– Finding humor
– Self-kindness
  • Not self-indulgence
– Recognizing our common humanity
  • Resist isolation
– Mindfulness
  • Acknowledging the current moment
Practicing Gratitude

A **practice of gratitude** has been shown to

- Improve physical symptoms and performance
- Improve psychological coping
- Improve sleep quality, alertness, and energy
- Improve self-esteem and empathy
- Improve relationships and reduces resentment
- Build optimism
- Have LASTING benefits
Survivorship Self-Care

• Remember that self-care improves your **quality of life** in many ways:
  – Physical
  – Psychological
  – Social
  – Spiritual

• **A gift of gratitude:** Your own Gratitude Journal is ready for you to use!