
Thoughts on
Living with Cancer

**How to Be an Active Participant
in Your Own Recovery:
Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed
Cancer Patient**



by Caren S. Fried, Ph.D.

My Personal Experience

In 1994, I was told those fateful words: “You have cancer.” At that time, I was 35 years old, a biologist, wife, and mother of a two year old. I was diagnosed with lung cancer, even though I had never smoked. My cancer treatments included two major lung surgeries (which resulted in the removal of my right lung), various standard and experimental aggressive chemotherapy treatments, and numerous alternative therapies. Despite all this, my cancer persisted. But so did I!

A turning point occurred for me when I decided to focus on my health instead of my illness. I believe that cancer is an illness of the body, mind, heart, and soul. Therefore, for me being healthy meant dealing with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues related to cancer as well as undergoing the physical treatments. In addition to the various conventional and alternative therapies which I pursued, writing became an important part of my own healing journey with cancer. To be able to express my emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in writing was critically important for my own overall health.

These pamphlets grew from the numerous notes that I wrote every day in my healing journal. The information that is available for newly diagnosed cancer patients can sometimes be overwhelming. It was my intention, therefore, to write short pamphlets concerning various topics that deal with the practical issues of living each day with cancer. I hope that these pamphlets will encourage discussion of topics that are often difficult yet necessary to deal with and to help cancer patients and their families make the numerous decisions that need to be made during this time.

Healing is a very personal issue and each person must find his/her own path to healing from cancer. To this day, I continue to focus on my health each day, to live a full active life as a mother and wife, and to pursue a new career as a writer despite cancer. It is my hope that these pamphlets will be useful for others seeking out a healing journey while living with cancer and beyond.

Caren S. Fried

Thoughts on --- *Living with Cancer*

How to Be an Active Participant in Your Own Recovery: Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patient

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How to Be an Active Participant in Your Own Recovery: Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patient

Writing in my journal was an important part of my recovery. I found that expressing my thoughts and feelings in words helped me make important treatment decisions.

—C.F.

Once you have heard the words “you have cancer”, it is difficult to think clearly as to what to do next. The following suggestions are for the newly diagnosed cancer patient. The main objective in these suggestions is to enable you to become an active participant in your own recovery from cancer. In doing so, you will decrease feelings of helplessness and begin to increase feelings of empowerment.



Get a second opinion (and more)

Do not rely exclusively on one doctor's opinion. Once your primary doctor has given you a diagnosis of cancer, get second opinions from as many doctors as possible concerning both the diagnosis and treatment options. Be sure to go to different types of doctors, i.e. an oncologist, surgeon, radiologist. Doctors often present your diagnosis with a sense of urgency and peo-

ple feel that they have to begin treatment immediately. Do not feel pressured into making any decisions. It is worthwhile to take a little extra time to get several opinions so that you feel confident in the treatment that you are about to undertake.



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Buy two notebooks

In one notebook, keep all of your medical information. Write down questions before your visit to the doctor. Bring your notebook with you to the doctor's office so that you can remember your questions and so that you can write down everything that is said or done. Also, try to go with someone to your doctor visits. It may be difficult to think clearly while in the doctor's office and it is good to have the support. If you are interested in seeing the reports of your blood tests, x-rays, etc., be sure to ask for them. They are reports about your body and you have the right to ask to see them if you want to.

The second notebook is to keep a personal journal of all your thoughts, feelings, dreams, etc. Expressing your thoughts in writing can often help you make important decisions concerning your treatments. As an active participant in your own recovery, it is important to use your own intuition along with medical information to make critical decisions concerning your body, your illness and your treatments.

Educate yourself

It is important to have a basic understanding of your disease and your treatment options in order to be an active participant in your recovery from cancer.

1. Call the National Cancer Institute (NCI) at 1-800-4-Cancer for the latest information on your type of

cancer and its treatment. This will give you the standard conventional western medical treatments that are available for your type of cancer. You can also get a list of clinical trials (experimental treatments) from NCI. Keep in mind, however, that this is not a complete list and there may be other clinical trials run elsewhere that are not listed with the NCI.

2. Call your local American Cancer Society, local hospitals, and any other local health related organizations to gather more information and to find out about activities or support groups for cancer patients within your community.
3. Join a support group. Members of support groups can be valuable sources of information concerning all aspects of a cancer diagnosis.
4. Use the internet on the computer. There is a wealth of information on the internet concerning cancer and its treatment.
5. Read any books about cancer that you can find. There are numerous books on general cancer information, conventional treatments, alternative treatments, psychological issues concerning cancer and its treatment, remarkable recoveries from cancer, and much more. Go to the library or bookstore and choose whatever books concerning cancer interest you.
6. Buy or borrow cassette tapes or videotapes concerning cancer. You can listen to cassette tapes while driving to the doctor's office or while you are in bed if you do not feel well enough to read. There are several videotapes that are also informative and inspiring.



Go to the library or bookstore and choose whatever books concerning cancer interest you.

Take advantage of alternative/complementary therapies

Alternative therapies generally refer to those therapies that are not considered part of mainstream Western medicine. They are, however, beginning to gain recognition by many physicians as helpful in the fight against cancer. While Western medicine attempts to treat the cancer directly, alternative therapies focus on strengthening the self-healing abilities of the individuals in their fight against cancer. In addition, alternative therapies can be very helpful in relieving stress and reducing pain.

Most alternative therapies can be used in conjunction with conventional treatments; thus the term complementary therapies. In fact, many studies have shown that alternative or complementary therapies can enhance the effectiveness of conventional Western treatments. Alternative therapies can also be used alone if you choose not to undergo Western medical treatments.

There is a tremendous amount of information on alternative or complementary therapies for cancer. Be cautious of those that proclaim miraculous cures. It is important to seek advice from reputable health professionals who are well-educated in their field.

Some examples of alternative, complementary, or unconventional therapies include the following:

1. Psychotherapy – individual or group
2. Nutrition – diet and supplements
3. Exercise
4. Traditional Chinese Medicine – acupuncture and Chinese herbs
5. Relaxation, meditation, and visual imagery


6. Energy healing
7. Prayer and spiritual healing
8. Homeopathy
9. Ayurvedic medicine

Decide on your treatment plan and believe in it!

Many studies have shown that the patient's belief that their treatment will help them does in fact increase the effectiveness of the treatment against the disease. If you or your doctors don't really believe that your treatment will help you, then it is less likely that it will help. If you feel out of control or powerless, it will be much more difficult to recover. Each person has to find in themselves what they believe to be the best path towards healing. By gathering information and using your own intuition, you can begin to make important decisions concerning your treatment plan along with your doctor and become an active participant in your own recovery.

Once you start looking, the information available on cancer and its treatment can be overwhelming. After your initial decisions about your treatment, you will want to continue to educate yourself. Your disease status may change and your treatment options may change over time and you will want to be well-informed. You can always discuss with your doctor the possibility of changing your treatment plan. Keep in mind, however, that constantly changing your plan, can undermine your belief that the treatments can work. Therefore, it is important to decide on a plan that you believe in and stay with it for a while.

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Summary



Becoming an active participant in your own recovery from cancer will empower you...

By gathering information and using your intuition to make treatment decisions, you will become an active participant in your own recovery from cancer. This approach will empower you and lead you on the best path for your personal healing journey.



Thoughts on Living with Cancer Pamphlets

Cancer as a Whole-Body Illness



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Coping with Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy



Positive Thinking - Helpful or Harmful for Cancer Patients?



Suggestions for Friends and Relatives of the Cancer Patient



An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer



Being a Parent with Cancer



Diagnosis Cancer: Why Me?



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