

LIVING HEALTHFULLY DURING CANCER

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Improving diet, exercise habits and your well-being.

There are no known causes for childhood cancer. The best diet and the healthiest habits do not prevent it. But it's still important for parents to help their children establish a lifestyle that promotes good health now and in the future.

There are many lifestyle factors that have been linked to health problems and cancer in the general population. These include diet, obesity, sun exposure and the use of alcohol and tobacco. Cancer survivors, who have undergone multiple treatment modalities such as chemotherapy, radiation, surgery or a bone marrow transplant, are at an increased risk for health problems, as well as a second cancer.

There is increased awareness of the long-term health problems that may occur the longer a childhood cancer survivor lives. With this greater likelihood of health concerns, it becomes even more important for survivors to maintain a healthy lifestyle to reduce or prevent some of the long-term effects from treatment.

Eating right and staying active can improve your health and overall sense of well-being. Research continually suggests that a healthy diet can reduce the chance of certain diseases, including cancer. As a parent, it's important to remember that healthy choices begin at home. Set a good example and encourage healthy habits for all your children.

Healthy eating during treatment.

Many studies show that having your child follow a healthy diet while undergoing cancer treatment can help minimize the unpleasant side effects. Cancer therapies often affect a child's appetite and weight so getting your child to eat healthier foods isn't always easy. Treatments can cause mouth sores, constipation or diarrhea which often interferes with appetite.

Should your child lose their appetite, giving small, frequent servings of food that are high in calories will help them maintain weight. On the other hand, children who have been prescribed steroids often have a voracious appetite and gain weight. It's important that you don't restrict your child's food intake to get the weight off. This weight gain will be temporary, so your focus should be maintaining your child's well-balanced diet. If you become concerned about your child's weight loss or gain, discuss his or her specific nutritional needs with your doctor. Often, nutritional supplements like Pediasure can help a child get the necessary nutrients.

You may see other changes in your child's eating habits, as well. Treatment often causes changes in tastes, making some children pickier eaters. If getting your child to eat healthy foods becomes too much of a battle, switch your strategy. The important thing is that a child eats and always gets plenty of fluids.

Hospital food can be less appetizing than the foods kids are used to eating at home. Many parents find bringing in the child's favorite meals can get them to eat more. Most kids just want to eat what their friends are eating, so you won't be the first parent to fight this battle. Diets limited by cancer treatment can be very challenging to manage. Try to be creative and think ahead.

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The shape of healthy eating.

Because what your child eats has such a direct impact on their health, it's important for them to consume a well-rounded and healthy diet filled with a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts and beans. That means limiting the intake of red meat and processed foods which are high in fat and sugar, and low in fiber. You should restrict the amount of salty and sodium-heavy processed foods which your child eats, too.

Pay particular attention to portion sizes, what the portions consist of and how they correlate to standard serving sizes. Be sure that 2/3 of your child's diet consists of plant based foods, and 1/3 or less is from animal foods such as meat and cheese. Cured meats, such as bacon and cold cuts, should only be eaten on rare occasions. Using the new USDA MyPlate icon will help you make wise and healthy choices for you and your family.

Ready, set, move!

The importance of physical activity can't be overlooked in promoting a healthy lifestyle. Exercise increases energy, improves mood and boosts self-esteem. It also stimulates the immune system while reducing the symptoms of pain, diarrhea and constipation. Experts recommend people of all ages get regular physical activity, including children, who need at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. Of course, you should always consult your child's doctor before beginning any strenuous exercises. Certain types of chemotherapy may lead to heart disease, which can be aggravated by vigorous activity.

Most of us believe our kids get more than enough exercise, but actually, one in five children in the United States are overweight or obese. Many kids spend too much time in front of the television, computer or playing video games instead of being active. Research has indicated there is an increased risk of obesity associated with certain treatments for childhood cancer, which makes it even more important to get your child accustomed to being active. Exercise can be something you share. Whether it's walking, hiking, biking, swimming or playing sports, it's a great way to spend time together, improve your health and reduce your own personal stress.

Where there's smoke, there are health problems.

Tobacco is the largest cause of preventable cancer in adults. Unfortunately, smokers aren't the only victims. Second-hand smoke from a lit cigarette and from a smoker's exhalation can cause lung cancer and heart disease. For children, second-hand smoke is even more dangerous because their lungs are still developing. In homes where a parent smokes, there's a higher incidence of asthma, along with inner-ear fluid buildup and middle-ear infections.

If you're a smoker, you're not only risking your child's health, you're setting an example that they may choose to follow. Recent studies show that seven out of ten high school students have tried smoking cigarettes. Making healthier lifestyle changes and communicating with your child about the risks of smoking can bring this number down.

During your child's treatment, second hand smoke may increase the risk for lung problems. Don't let others smoke in your home. If you're a smoker, quit. Your health and the health of your family depend on it.

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A toast to being alcohol free.

There is evidence that drinking large amounts of alcohol can elevate the risks of several types of adult cancers and chronic conditions. Excessive drinking can have many emotional side effects too, such as depression, impaired judgment, and the shedding of inhibitions. Those who have undergone treatment are at an increased health risk, so drinking is not recommended as part of a healthy lifestyle for cancer survivors. If you choose to drink in front of your child, do so in moderation.

The legal drinking age is 21, yet a staggering 70% of American high school seniors have consumed some form of alcoholic beverage within the last month. Many studies show that the earlier a person starts drinking, the more likely they are to have alcohol-related problems in adulthood. Talk to your teen about the risks of alcohol consumption, especially as it relates to their long term health and survivorship. Be sure the behavior you demonstrate serves as a positive role model.

Just Between Us | Survival Tips from other Survivors

"We called places ahead of time and made special arrangements. For example we went to dinosaur bone dig a half hour before the scheduled time without the crowd. It's amazing how people will do their best to accommodate a sick child. We also put a list of things to do and places to be approved by the nurse educator and made sure they were okay."
- Linda, mother of Sam (Neuroblastoma)

"At the same time you push healthy eating, sometimes you have to understand that occasionally, you may just need to let them eat whatever. When my daughter lost a lot of weight, her doctor said to let her eat whatever-just to keep/put weight on and get her eating again."
- Shana, mother of Mackenzie (Rhabdomyosarcoma)

Here comes the sun.

Everyone enjoys spending time in the warm sunshine, but too much sun exposure can cause serious health problems. Studies have found that excessive ultraviolet (UV) radiation can cause skin cancer in adulthood. Children undergoing chemotherapy or radiation may also be more sensitive to sun exposure. Be sure your child's skin is protected from the sun at all times. Use these tips to ensure your child is well protected.

- 1) **Use a minimum of SPF 15.** Apply 15-20 minutes before sun exposure. SPF 15 will block out 93% of UVB rays, which are the more dangerous burning rays.
- 2) **Apply sunscreen every two hours.** Apply a thick layer and reapply after swimming. Keep track of the freshness date on the package.
- 3) **Limit your time in the sun.** Avoid peak hours of damaging rays between late morning and early afternoon.

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- 4) **Have your child wear a hat.** If the hat doesn't protect the ears, be sure to apply sunscreen to the ears and back of the neck.
- 5) **Have your child wear UV-protective sunglasses.**
- 6) **Dress your child in UV-protective clothing.** Long-sleeve shirts and long pants, when appropriate, will protect your child's skin from the sun's damaging rays.
- 7) **Avoid indoor tanning beds.** They contain the same dangerous UV rays as natural sun exposure.
- 8) **Set a good example.** The sun habits you practice will protect your family now and down the road.

These and other healthy lifestyle habits will help your child be stronger through their cancer treatments and healthier for many years to follow.

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RESOURCES

Help for the climb

For additional resources, visit beyondthecure.org or talk to a member of your child's medical team.

Medical

National Cancer Institute

800-4-CANCER cancer.gov
Provides state-of-the-art information about the treatment of individual types of cancer, clinical trials and late effects.

CureSearch

800-458-6223 curesearch.org
Funds research and provides information to those affected by childhood cancer.

Chemo Care

chemocare.com
Provides information about chemotherapy and side effects.

Insurance/Legal

HealthCare.gov

healthcare.gov
A government sponsored web site on healthcare information.

Patient Advocate Foundation

800-532-5274 patientadvocate.org
Solve insurance and healthcare access problems.

Social Security Administration

800-772-1213 ssa.gov
Provides answers to questions regarding social security benefits.

Support, Advocacy and Financial Assistance

The National Children's Cancer Society

800-5-FAMILY theNCCS.org
Emotional support, advocacy, education, and financial assistance to parents of children with cancer and an online community for parents and survivors.

American Cancer Society

800-ACS-2345 cancer.org
Information on parental issues such as coping with diagnosis, understanding the health care system, financial and insurance information, and transitioning your child back into school.

Association of Cancer Online Resources (ACOR)

acor.org
Electronic support groups to patients, caregivers, and survivors.

Cancercare 800-813-HOPE cancercare.org Individual and group counseling both on-line and via their toll-free counseling line.

Supersibs

888-417-4704 supersibs.org
Support for brothers and sisters of children with cancer.

First Hand Foundation

816-201-1569 applications.cerner.com/firsthand
Financial assistance for treatment, equipment, displacement and vehicle modifications for children with health problems.

United Healthcare Children's Foundation

952-992-4459 uhccf.org
Financial help for medical services such as speech, physical or occupational therapy, prescriptions, and medical equipment such as wheelchairs, orthotics and hearing aids.

Healthy Living

American Institute of Cancer Research

800-843-8114 aicr.org
Offers specific nutrition information for the cancer survivor.

SmokeFree

877-448-7848 smokefree.gov
Help for those who want to quit smoking

Sun Safety Alliance

703-481-1414 sunsafetyalliance.org
Provides information on sun safety.

Learning Disabilities

National Center for Learning Disabilities

888-575-7373 nld.org
Solutions and opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities.

Survivorship

Beyond the Cure Survivorship Program

Sponsored by The National Children's Cancer Society
800-5-FAMILY beyondthecure.org
Information on all aspects of cancer survivorship, a late effects assessment tool and college scholarships.

Livestrong

866-673-7205 livestrong.org
Awareness, advocacy and support for the cancer community.