

*Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness*

*for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*



American Cancer Society Circle Of Life<sup>SM</sup>  
*Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*

Wellness along the Cancer Journey:

Treatment

Revised October 2015

Chapter 4: Coping after Cancer Treatment



## *Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness*

### *for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*

## **Coping After Cancer Treatment**

<b>Pre-module Knowledge Questions</b>		<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
<b>1.</b>	It is normal for a person to be depressed after cancer treatment. There is nothing that can be done about it.			
<b>2.</b>	Following traditional American Indian and Alaska Native ways can support well-being after treatment.			
<b>3.</b>	Eating well, exercising, and maintaining a healthy weight are important for cancer survivors.			

When treatment ends, a person begins a new time in life that can bring hope, happiness, and maybe fear. Each person who has been through cancer treatment looks forward to getting back to normal life. Everyone copes with their cancer journey and deals with the challenges they face in their own way.

Good self-care, taking an active role in treatment, and focusing on the important things in life help many people cope with cancer. It is not always possible for someone to do all the things they did in the past, but there are ways to make each day count. A person being treated for cancer should ask for help when they need it and do what brings them joy.

### **Self-care**

It is important that someone being treated for cancer practice self-care for the whole person. This includes their physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual wellness. Physical activities such as walking in nature and dancing can improve their sense of well-being. Music, art, and other creative ways of self-expression can also be helpful. Prayer can help with anxiety and calm the mind.

Spirituality can be a source of great strength for some people. Some cancer survivors find a new connection to spirituality after their diagnosis. Others find their cancer experience strengthens their existing connection and gives them hope. Some may want to seek an elder or spiritual leader to help guide them.

## ***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

### ***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

Following are some reminders about self-care after cancer treatment ends:

- Be open about fears. Express fears to family, friends, or a spiritual guide. Write in a journal, dance, sing, or express oneself in a way that feels good.
- Focus on keeping healthy. Eat healthy meals with plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Get out of the house for activities that bring joy.
- Take time for self-care and ease back into a daily routine. It may take time to gain back energy and strength.
- Go to all follow-up appointments. Write down all side effects and concerns to discuss with the health care provider, and take a family member or friend to appointments.
- Talk to someone about ongoing sadness, anger, and other feelings. Many times these feelings will fade, but other times they develop into depression.
- Don't try to do it all alone. Share tasks with family and friends. Be reasonable with yourself about the new routine.

Source: (Mayo Clinic, (2009). Cancer survivors: managing your emotions after cancer treatment. Retrieved September 24, 2009, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cancer-survivor/CA00071>.)

### **Emotional Distress**

For some people, one of the hardest times is after cancer treatment is finished. Rather than feeling happy that treatment is all over, they feel even greater distress. Certain signs and symptoms can be a warning that sadness and stress levels are too high and becoming serious. These signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling anxious or overwhelmed
- Being overcome by a sense of dread, the sense that something bad is going to happen
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling or looking tense

## ***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

### ***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

- Trouble thinking, remembering, solving problems, or making decisions (about even little things)
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or hopeless – wondering if there is any point in going on
- Sleep changes (can't sleep, early waking, or oversleeping)\*
- Change in eating (loss of appetite or overeating) for a few weeks, including weight loss or gain
- Loss of interest or pleasure in nearly everything most of the time
- Being “slowed down” or restless almost every day, enough for others to notice
- Being cranky or angry with others
- Family conflicts or issues that seem impossible to handle
- Questioning faith and religious beliefs that once gave comfort
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts at suicide

If any signs or symptoms describe someone you know, talk to a health care provider as soon as possible. Today, health care providers realize that emotional distress can be a part of having cancer. They know that it should be treated along with the physical symptoms of cancer.

Just as with the pain scale, a person can choose a distress number from zero to 10. This rating reflects how much distress they feel today and how much they felt over the past week. Zero is no distress and 10 is the highest level of distress they can imagine. They can use this rating when they talk to their health care provider. See Appendix B for ten suggestions about managing stress.

### **Physical Changes**

Cancer and treatment can cause changes to the body. Side effects from cancer treatment, such as weight loss or weight gain, fatigue, hair loss, and skin changes, can also change the way someone looks. Some of these changes go away over time. It can take time to adjust to those changes that last longer.

## ***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

### ***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

Caring for our appearance and looking our best helps us feel better about ourselves. This is especially important when someone is ill, because that is when they tend to feel least good about how they look. Along with hygiene routines, someone may want to put extra time and energy into their appearance. Taking care of oneself will help with feeling more confident and in control.

Some self-care suggestions:

- Continue routine grooming, even if confined to bed. Keep fixing hair and using makeup (if you normally wear makeup).
- Consider a wig or toupee if dealing with hair loss.
- Have clothes altered if weight changes.
- Pamper yourself with something that feels good.
- Use an electric razor for routine shaving to prevent breaks in the skin.
- Exercise daily, as much as can be managed comfortably.
- Get enough rest .
- Maintain regular dental care.

### **Wellness after Cancer Treatment**

Many of the ancestral ways among American Indian and Alaska Native people were very healthy. Active hunting and gathering traditional foods, eating home-cooked and fresh foods, and not drinking alcohol were all part of those traditions. Someone who watches TV all day, eats fast food, drinks alcohol, and smokes commercial tobacco may want to consider learning and practicing healthy family and community traditions.

Eating well, being active, and staying at a healthy weight are especially important for cancer survivors. People who survive cancer are sometimes at higher risk for other cancers, heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis (bone loss). The main goal after cancer treatment should be to start life-long habits – healthy eating, physical activity, and weight control. Those who already have good habits can make them even stronger. Healthy habits are essential to good health.

Remember these tips for eating right and being physically active:

## ***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

### ***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

- Eat a variety of healthful foods, with at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Choose whole grains rather than refined starches and sweetened foods.
- Choose foods and drinks in amounts that help you get to and maintain a healthy weight. Read labels to learn portion sizes.
- Switch to vegetables, fruits, and other low-calorie foods and drinks to replace high-calorie foods and drinks such as French fries, cheeseburgers, pizza, ice cream, doughnuts and other sweets, and regular sodas.
- Limit processed meats, such as hot dogs, bacon, and luncheon meats. When you eat meat, choose lean cuts and smaller portions. Choose poultry, fish, or beans instead of red meats such as pork, beef, or lamb.
- Be physically active. Adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week (or an equivalent combination spread throughout the week. Each minute of vigorous activity counts for 2 minutes of moderate activity.)
- Children and teens need at least an hour of moderate to vigorous activity each day, with vigorous activity at least 3 days each week.
- Limit sedentary behavior such as sitting, lying down, watching TV, and other forms of screen-based entertainment.
- Get to and maintain a healthy weight.
- Alcohol can promote cancer growth. Those who drink should limit intake to 2 drinks or less per day for men, and 1 drink or less per day for women. (A drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.)
- Stop habitual tobacco use. Don't start using commercial tobacco.
- Remember to get regular cancer screenings according to American Cancer Society guidelines. These start at different ages for different kinds of cancer, and are different for men and women. Talk with your health care provider about what you should do and when to start.

***Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness***

***for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities***

- Remember to get regular check-ups to look for things like high blood pressure and diabetes.

# Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness

## for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

### Activity

A person is so much more than a cancer diagnosis. People are a whole, with physical, spiritual, social, mental, and emotional needs. What support do you need in each of these areas of your life? Use the wheel below to identify current and new ways to stay well in mind, body, spirit, and environment.

**Mind**  
(knowledge, new ideas, creativity, express feelings, self-esteem, outlook on life)

What I Do Now: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I Would Like to Add: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Body**  
(exercise, sleep, nutrition, alcohol, caffeine, smoking, seatbelt, dental care)

What I Do Now: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I Would Like to Add: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Spirit**  
(meaning in life, sense of purpose, peace, hope, faith, prayer / meditation, values)

What I Do Now: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I Would Like to Add: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Environment**  
(friendship, relationships, community service, nature)

What I Do Now: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I Would Like to Add: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness**  
**for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities**

### Story of Hope

Here's what one cancer survivor has to share:

*"Your last day of treatment is a day to celebrate! When treatment is over it can be difficult sometimes to get back to your normal pre-cancer life. The diagnosis of cancer dominates your life for so long, when treatment is over it takes a while to get back into your regular routine. I think I find my anniversary of being diagnosed a time of mixed emotions. You are thrilled to have made it another year of being cancer-free, yet you are also reminded of the anguish you went through."*

*Delores, cancer survivor*

(American Cancer Society, (2014). *Coping with cancer in everyday life: life after cancer*. Retrieved September 21, 2009, from [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/MBC/content/MBC\\_4\\_1X\\_Life\\_After\\_Cancer.asp?sitearea=MB C](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/MBC/content/MBC_4_1X_Life_After_Cancer.asp?sitearea=MB C))

### Key Messages

- Someone being treated for cancer should have compassion for themselves. Remember everyone copes with their cancer journey in their own way. It is OK if a person needs extra help.
- Appreciate the words of friends and family, and remember they are trying their best to care for the person who has finished cancer treatment.
- Know the signs and symptoms of when sadness, anxiety, or stress is becoming a serious problem. Seek help from a health care provider.
- The main goal after cancer treatment should be to set up life-long healthy eating, physical activity, and weight control habits. Strengthen and reinforce existing good habits.