EMPOWER

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WELLNESS
GUIDE
FOR CANCER
SURVIVORS

THrive
Dear Friend,

You are not alone.

Every year more than 36,000 Massachusetts residents hear the words, “You have cancer.” Thanks to better ways of finding and treating cancer, there are more cancer survivors living today than ever before.

Some cancer survivors will complete treatment. Others continue on active treatment, managing cancer much like a chronic health condition. While each survivor’s cancer and treatment may be different, each is living through the experience just like you. They have similar questions and fears, as well as similar determination, and hopes about getting better and moving forward with their lives.

This guide is not about your cancer treatment; it is to help you prepare for the journey ahead and improve the quality of your life.

We hope this information:

- Teaches you how wellness can improve your life
- Empowers you to take control of your care and well-being
- Inspires you with stories of cancer survivors who made changes to improve their lives

There will be tough days ahead. There will also be good days. The goal of this guide is to help you make all the days ahead the best they can be.

Just remember, in the cancer survivor’s journey there will always be someone on the road just ahead to help you, and someone just behind who can learn from your wisdom. You are not alone.

We hope this guide will help you navigate your own journey and thrive.

Survivorship Workgroup
Massachusetts Comprehensive Cancer Prevention & Control Network
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Cancer Prevention and Control Network’s Survivorship Workgroup, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, wish to thank the many local cancer survivors and experts who offered their stories, time and expertise so generously. The development of this wellness guide would not have been possible without their help.

We also want to thank the many national and local cancer awareness, education and advocacy organizations that served as sources for much of the evidence-based information in this guide. A list of sources used to produce this guide can be found on our website www.mass.gov/cancersurvivor. For more information about the Massachusetts Cancer Prevention and Control Network, visit www.mass.gov/compcancer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR AND WHY IT WAS DEVELOPED.........................1

PHYSICAL WELLNESS......................................................................................3

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS..................................................................................9

SOCIAL WELLNESS..........................................................................................17

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS..................................................................................21

THINKING WELLNESS..................................................................................25

WORKING WELLNESS..................................................................................31

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WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR AND WHY IT WAS DEVELOPED:

This guide was created for adults in Massachusetts who have survived any type of cancer. Before, during, and after your cancer treatment there may be many things you feel you have no control over. This guide was written to cover areas that you do have some control over. No matter what type of cancer you were diagnosed with, the information in this guide may help you improve the quality of your life through wellness.

WHAT IS WELLNESS?

You may see the term “wellness” and think of it as an exercise program or a new diet. It is more than that. The different parts of wellness covered in this guide include:

- **Physical** - What you can do to care for your body to help make you stronger for your treatment and beyond.
- **Emotional** - How to cope with feelings you have throughout your cancer journey, and how to nurture relationships with family and friends.
- **Social** - How to help your community and help yourself by helping others.
- **Spiritual** - How to honor your values, beliefs and the meaning of your life.
- **Thinking (cognitive)** - How to keep your mind active, and manage the effects of treatments like chemotherapy, by following your creative and learning interests.
- **Working** - How to cope with work concerns as a cancer survivor and what your employment rights are in Massachusetts.
WHY WELLNESS IS IMPORTANT FOR CANCER SURVIVORS:

Wellness is important for everyone, but it is especially important for people who have been diagnosed and treated for cancer. The effects of the illness and treatment, the stress and the disruption cancer causes can take a heavy toll.

Taking an active role in improving your quality of life through wellness – in whatever area you choose – can help strengthen you before, during and after your treatment; and it may help reduce the chances of your cancer coming back.

For each area of wellness, we include stories from cancer survivors like you who took small steps to improve their quality of life. Read, watch or listen as they share what the journey has meant to them. Use them as inspiration to work on the areas of your wellness that you want to improve.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS GUIDE:

Online videos included as part of the guide allow you to watch cancer survivors tell their own stories. You can also learn helpful information from experts who work with cancer survivors.

There are two ways to access the videos:

- Visit the web addresses listed in the guide, or
- Use a “QR” reader to scan the QR codes on the pages

ABOUT QR CODES:

QR (Quick Response) codes are a simple way to get information using your mobile device. To scan a QR code you need a smartphone or tablet with a QR reader. You can download a QR reader wherever you download apps for your phone or tablet.
Joseph Feaster’s code about staying healthy is simple: “I don’t worry about what I can’t control, but I’m going to take charge of what I can control.” Nowhere is that more evident than his focus on physical wellness. A prostate cancer diagnosis more than a decade ago was a wake-up call to become more active and to improve his diet. His walking routine and better eating habits have paid off. At 65, he’s a model for other cancer survivors on how to take simple steps toward wellness and how to play an active role in your own care.

WHAT IT IS:

Physical wellness is about doing what you can to help strengthen and care for your body. Taking steps before, during, and after your treatment can help you manage the effects of the illness and side effects of treatment.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Improving physical wellness can:

- Make you feel stronger
- Help you feel less tired
- Help improve your mood
- Help lower the risk that your cancer will return
**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

1. **Move More:** This does not mean undertaking an intense exercise program. In fact, starting slow is the best course of action.

   Listen to your body. Physical comfort is important for wellness, so if you are feeling sick from treatment, or are in pain, talk to your doctor before taking part in physical activities.

   **According to experts, a program to become more physically active has three main parts:**

   - **It is “aerobic”,** meaning it is activity that gets your heart rate pumping, but not so high that you can’t talk in short sentences while you are doing it. Aerobic activity includes things like walking, swimming or riding a bike. Your goal should be 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five times per week. If you can’t start with 30 minutes, break up the time into two 15-minute walks, or three walks that last 10 minutes. Just do what you can and build your endurance over time.

   - **It involves strength training,** or activity that helps you maintain, tone and build your muscles. This could include working with light weights, or using a weight machine or resistance bands. Your goal should be 2 days of strength training per week.

   - **It includes stretching and improving balance,** to keep you flexible and steady on your feet. This could include things like yoga or Tai Chi, a graceful style of Chinese exercise.
2. Stop Smoking: If you smoke, try to stop. Talk to your doctor about medications and counseling to help you quit smoking. Most health insurance covers the cost of quitting smoking for as many times as you need.

You can also call the free Massachusetts Smokers’ Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669).

3. Eat Better: Improving your diet is one of the most important parts of improving physical wellness. Maintain a healthy weight by:

- Eating whole foods, including whole grain products (limit processed foods)
- Eating at least 2.5 cups of fruits and vegetables each day
- Choosing foods low in salt, saturated fat and sugar
- Drinking water (limit alcohol and sugar sweetened drinks)

These are general guidelines. Talk to your doctor, or a nutritionist if you have special dietary requirements based on your unique situation.

4. Get Enough Sleep: According to the National Cancer Institute, upwards of 50% of cancer patients report some trouble sleeping. Getting rest is very important to cancer survivors who often feel tired because of the physical or emotional effects of the illness or treatment. Talk to your doctor if you are having trouble sleeping. Getting enough sleep can improve the quality of your life before, during, and after your treatment.
Wellness Warriors
Learn how a dragon boat race team in Boston helps strengthen the body, mind and spirit.

http://tinyurl.com/WellWarriors
Dr. Jacques Carter, men’s health expert and primary care physician at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, talks about the importance of cancer survivors maintaining a relationship with their primary care physician.
After successful but very difficult treatment for tonsil cancer, Mary Lou Rossano-Collier was ready to get on with her life. But the treatments that saved her life also took an emotional toll. She knew she needed to talk to someone about what she was feeling. After seeing an ad in her local paper, Mary Lou decided to visit a cancer survivor support group. When she arrived, the only other person there was the social worker organizing the new group. She told Mary Lou that although it was just the two of them that she could stay and they could talk. She could even cry if she wanted to. And so Mary Lou did. After a couple more visits, Mary Lou told the social worker to call when the group formed and she would come back. She has been attending ever since, and is now a mentor for other survivors.

[ SURVIVOR STORY ]

Learn more about Mary Lou’s wellness journey.

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

http://tinyurl.com/MaryLouRC

WHAT IT IS:

Emotional wellness is about your feelings, how to recognize them, express them, and how to manage them in a way that supports your treatment and recovery. Fear, anger, stress, and hopelessness can affect you and your relationships. You may wonder how to deal with these feelings. You may have difficulty talking with family and friends about them. You may need help, but are unsure how to ask for it.

All of these reactions and concerns are normal and can come up at any point in your cancer experience.
WHAT YOU CAN DO:

According to the Association of Oncology Social Work, to improve your emotional wellness, you can:

1. **Keep track of your feelings.** Keep a journal of how you are feeling emotionally. It does not have to be in writing. You can also use photos, drawings, or music to express how you feel.

2. **Share your feelings with people close to you.** This can be hard because you may feel like you are burdening someone else with your problems, but it is very important to talk with someone you trust. If not a family member or friend, find a support group or counselor.

3. **Consider learning a self-care practice such as mindfulness meditation.** Mindfulness meditation is a practice that teaches you to be more aware and “in the moment”; knowing what you are doing, when you are doing it. It can reduce stress through breathing exercises and help to keep you focused on the present moment, reducing “what if” thinking that can often cause stress for cancer survivors. In his groundbreaking book, The Relaxation Response, Harvard Medical School Researcher, Dr. Herbert Benson, writes that practicing simple self-care techniques like meditation can help improve anxiety, depression, fatigue and the side effects of cancer.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Improving emotional wellness can:

- Make you aware that your feelings are normal
- Teach you strategies to feel less afraid and more hopeful
- Help you deal with stress and improve your emotional well-being
- Help you manage relationships with family and friends
- Help you talk about your feelings
- Encourage you to ask for and accept help
4. **Tell your doctor or nurse about your feelings.** Your doctor and care team want you to have the best quality of life possible. Talk to them about your emotions before, during, and after your treatment. They can refer you to supportive counseling and, if necessary, evaluate and treat you for anxiety or depression.

5. **Seek individual counseling with a professional.** There are professional social workers; psychologists and doctors who can help you deal with the powerful emotions you may feel. It is important to find a counselor that you can connect with, and one with experience working with people who have been diagnosed with cancer.

6. **Join a support group.** Taking part in a group with people who are going through similar experiences can help you feel less alone, and provide help in a safe supportive environment. Whatever group you decide to join, if you are joining one for the first time you should consider a group that is led by a professional counselor. Find out the group’s focus, the leader’s qualifications, and the type of cancer survivors attending the sessions.

**Other ways to manage stress include:**

- Being physically active
- Practicing yoga or Tai Chi
- Massage therapy
- Acupuncture (by a qualified practitioner, using single-use, disposable needles for each patient to lower the risk of infection)
TALKING WITH CHILDREN:

If you are a parent, few things can be more difficult than answering questions from both young and adult children. They are likely deeply worried about you and may not know how to express their fears and concerns. In some cases, they may be worried about their own future and if they too may someday be told they have cancer. These discussions can be different based on the age of the child.

Find expert tips on how to talk with your children about cancer by visiting our website: www.mass.gov/cancersurvivor

A WORD ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH:

In her book, After Breast Cancer, Hester Hill Schnipper says, “Sex is one way we say, ‘I’m alive!’ The sensations, the intimacy, the closeness and sense of healthy well-being that it creates is unique.”

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS:

Cancer can have a profound effect on relationships. In many cases, dealing with cancer will deepen the bonds you have with people closest to you. However, it can also cause changes that you might not expect. You may find that family members are not as supportive as you thought they would be. Longtime friends may have drifted away. Others may try to offer support in ways that are not helpful or wanted.

These challenges are common, and can often be dealt with through open and honest communication.

• **Keep the lines of communication open.** Some family and friends may not have any experience with cancer. They may not know what to say or worry about saying the wrong thing. Let them know what works for you. Let them know if they can talk openly with you about cancer and your experience with it. Tell them how they can also stay in touch through email, texting or through social networking sites. Let them know that sometimes you just need them to listen. For those who find communication exhausting, there are programs like CaringBridge® that offer a way of communicating with many people in one posting.

• **Ask for and accept help.** Be specific about what you need. Do you need help with meals, errands or transportation to medical appointments? Ask your family and friends to keep including you in get-togethers, even if you cannot attend.

• **Accept changes.** Cancer will change your perspective about many things. That change in perspective can mean changes in your relationships with family and friends. It also means that you may find new friends through your treatment and recovery. Focus on relationships that provide you the support you need.
How you feel about yourself, anger, fear, depression, fatigue, and your body image can all influence your sexual health. In addition, your treatment, along with the effects of cancer can cause physical problems that can make wanting, having, and enjoying sex more difficult. This is normal and help is available.

Tips from The American Cancer Society include:

- Learn about how your cancer treatment might affect your sexual activity
- Remember that you may still be able to feel pleasure from touching
- Keep an open mind about ways to feel sexual pleasure
- Talk to your partner about sex; what works and what does not, so that sex is pleasurable for both of you
- Feel good about yourself and take part in activities that increase that feeling
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about questions you have about sex during and after treatment, and how to get help if necessary

Talking about sex and sexual health is very difficult for most people, even if cancer is not involved. However, taking that first step of talking to your partner, or care team if necessary, may get you the help you need.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- How am I feeling emotionally?
- What can I do to feel less stressed, sad, angry or depressed?
- If I need help with my feelings, do I have friends who have had cancer who can recommend a support group or counselor?
- What do I need from family and friends to help me through my treatment and recovery?
- How much information should I share with family, friends and my children about my diagnosis and treatment?
- If I am feeling sad, anxious, angry or depressed, how long should those feelings last and what can I do to help cope with those feelings?
- What can I do to manage the stress I’m feeling?
- Are there support groups or individual counselors that can help me?
- Am I healthy enough to be sexually active, and is there any type of sexual activity I should avoid?
- If I am having difficulty with sex, can I (perhaps with my partner) be referred to a sexual health therapist or program?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR OR CARE TEAM:

- If I am feeling sad, anxious, angry or depressed, how long should those feelings last and what can I do to help cope with those feelings?
- What can I do to manage the stress I’m feeling?
- Are there support groups or individual counselors that can help me?
- Am I healthy enough to be sexually active, and is there any type of sexual activity I should avoid?
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MOCHA: Building A Supportive Community

Men often have difficulty talking about their feelings, especially if they have been diagnosed with cancer. Support groups can help. Learn how the men of MOCHA (Men of Color Health Awareness) find emotional support and provide support to other men in their community of Springfield.

Pictured from left, Lamont Scott, Archie Emmanuel, Jr., Dwight Parker

http://tinyurl.com/MOCHA-Men1
Dr. Areej El-Jawahri, oncologist with the Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant Center at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and researcher on strategies to improve the quality of life for cancer survivors, talks about common emotional challenges faced by cancer survivors and how to deal with them.

http://tinyurl.com/EmotionalWell

Sharon Bober, PhD, founder and director of the Sexual Health program at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, talks about common sexual health problems experienced by cancer survivors and how to manage them.

http://tinyurl.com/DrBober

Dr. Herbert Benson, director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute, Mind Body Medicine professor at Harvard Medical School, and best selling author of the Relaxation Response, provides a brief guided instruction on his groundbreaking relaxation method to manage stress.

http://tinyurl.com/BensonRelax1

Get more information and expert tips about improving your emotional wellness at our website: www.mass.gov/cancersurvivor
SOCIAL WELLNESS

Christine Baze, Salem
A force of nature. That’s the term that comes to mind when you first meet Christine Baze, singer-songwriter, activist and cervical cancer survivor. After being diagnosed at 31, she went through surgery and treatment that saved her life - and that provided her with a mission. Christine’s cancer was caused by the human papillomavirus, or HPV. In the 15 years since her diagnosis, she’s used her inspiring words, songs and story to educate others about the HPV vaccine, which can prevent cancer caused by HPV. Whether on stage performing, advocating in the halls of government, or appearing in an award-winning documentary, Christine is using her experience to give back and help others.

[ SURVIVOR STORY ]

Learn more about Christine’s wellness journey.

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

http://tinyurl.com/CBazeWell1

WHAT IT IS:

Social wellness is about making contributions to help others, your community or the world around you. Giving your time and effort on behalf of others could help improve your own health and well-being. Studies have shown it can increase a sense of purpose, well-being, and happiness. Some cancer survivors create a network of support by participating in cancer education efforts with other survivors.
WHAT YOU CAN DO:

If you are interested in volunteering, here are some tips to follow:

1. Choose a group, cause or activity that interests you.

2. Consider volunteering for a cancer advocacy or support organization, or even a cause not related to cancer. Many national and local organizations need your help in educating the community, helping to change policy, and raising funds to support a cause.

3. Start slowly. Try not to do too much. If you are tired, do not be afraid to say no when asked to do more.

4. Give yourself some credit. Volunteering can be difficult, but you are doing something special when you give of yourself to help others.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- What issue, cause, or community problem do I care deeply about?
- What can I do with my time and talent to be of service to others in my community?
- Is there a cancer advocacy or other community organization that I can volunteer for?
- How much time can I commit to helping others, while taking care of myself and not doing too much?
- Can I connect with other cancer survivors through my volunteer work?

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Improving your social wellness can:

- Help you feel better about yourself
- Make you feel less isolated
- Help others
- Improve your support network by connecting you with others who may share your experience and desire to help others and your community

Get more information and expert tips about improving your social wellness at our website: www.mass.gov/cancersurvivor
[ SURVIVOR STORIES ]

Beverly Herbert is an ordained minister and graduate of MIT, but nothing quite prepared this Holyoke resident for what she would experience as a two-time breast cancer survivor. Watch Beverly’s story about how she gives back, using her wisdom to guide other survivors on their cancer journey.

http://tinyurl.com/BevHerbert

Lung cancer survivor Diane Legg’s advocacy and activism to support lung cancer awareness and research was kindled by a promise she made after the illness claimed a good friend. See how this Amesbury resident’s voice and leadership is making a difference.

http://tinyurl.com/DianeLegg

[ EXPERT VOICE ]

Moments House. Social wellness is about taking part in efforts to help people, causes and communities. See how this mother-daughter team in Pittsfield built Moments House to honor a friend who had died of breast cancer. In the process, they created a vital space in the Berkshires for cancer survivors to get support and to give back.

http://tinyurl.com/MomentsWell
When Emily MacRae was diagnosed with breast cancer, it seemed as though it was another in a series of losses that were happening at that point in her life. Her marriage was ending, her children were grown and beginning lives of their own, and she had recently lost her job. In fact, when she was being discharged from the hospital after her surgery, she couldn’t find anyone to give her a ride home. Then, as so often happened during and after her treatment, she saw someone from her church visiting another patient. Emily found her ride home, and through her faith and the support of her faith community, found a way to persevere and thrive.

[ SURVIVOR STORY ]

Learn more about Emily’s wellness journey.

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

http://tinyurl.com/EmilyMacRae

WHAT IT IS:

Spiritual wellness has to do with our beliefs, values and the search for meaning in our lives. The search for meaning before, during, and after treatment is common for cancer survivors. Many people engage in spiritual activities to help them cope with the fear and uncertainty cancer can bring. You may find your spiritual home in your current faith tradition, or you may seek out a different religious organization. Others may find spirituality in nature or meditation, rather than in a place of worship. It is less important where you find support for your spiritual side, than it is to find a spiritual practice that supports you.
WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

According to studies, spiritual wellness can:

- Help you cope with the trauma of diagnosis and treatment
- Reduce anxiety, stress, anger and depression
- Enhance the quality of your life
- Increase feelings of inner peace and hope

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

If you are interested in focusing on your spirituality, here are some tips:

1. Connect with a faith community of your choice. Many organized religious organizations have programs for people dealing with serious health problems.

2. Talk to your doctor or care team about your spirituality questions or preferences. Many treatment centers and teams can connect you to pastoral staff or advisors who can support your spiritual needs.

3. Consider a spiritual practice that supports and brings you inner peace. For some, this might mean regular prayer time alone or with a group, participating in a spiritual retreat, taking a walk in the woods, or practicing meditation. Others might practice yoga, Tai Chi or Qigong. (Some forms of yoga can be strenuous. Check with your doctor or care team for information about the right form of yoga for you.)

4. Make sure the experience is helping you. A spiritual home or practice should support you and feel comforting. In the wake of a diagnosis of cancer, some people begin to doubt their faith tradition, or are angry with God. If this is how you feel talk to your care team, spiritual advisor or someone you trust.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Is there someone in my community I can talk to about my spiritual needs?
- Is there a form of spiritual practice, religious or otherwise, that I would like to explore?
- Where can I learn more about meditation?
- Will taking part in a spiritual practice be comforting or stressful?
Questions to Ask Your Doctor or Care Team:

- I am angry with God, and doubt my faith; is there someone I can speak to about my feelings?
- What other kinds of spiritual support can you recommend?

[ Expert Voices ]

Rev. Molly Baskette, MDiv, lead pastor at the First Church Somerville UCC, and a lung cancer survivor, talks about how focusing on spiritual wellness can benefit cancer survivors.

http://tinyurl.com/RevMolly

Yoga offers many wellness benefits. Sudha Carolyn Lundeen, RN, E-RYT 500, senior teacher at the Kripalu Center in the Berkshires, and a three-time cancer survivor, talks about yoga as a spiritual practice.

http://tinyurl.com/SudhaSpirit
For more than 30 years, Rich Serino spent his days caring for and protecting the residents of Boston. As one of the city’s first medics and later as the Chief of Boston EMS, he saw every type of medical emergency. Toward the end of his career in Boston, as fate would have it, he became a patient. After two serious bouts of unrelated cancer, his surgeries and treatments left him weakened. After returning to work, he recalls the fogginess of thought that cancer survivors often describe after their treatment. With time, effort, and the support of his family Rich’s energy and concentration improved. So much so, that when President Obama called for him to serve as the Deputy Administrator and Chief Operating Officer of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Rich did what comes naturally; he answered the call and said yes.

[ SURVIVOR STORY ]

Learn more about Richard’s wellness journey.

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

http://tinyurl.com/SerinoStory

WHAT IT IS:

Thinking, or cognitive wellness, is about expanding your knowledge and stimulating your brain by taking part in activities that feed your curiosity and express your creative talents. It can involve learning a new skill, taking a class, reading about a new subject, or writing that novel that you have always wanted to write. This dimension of wellness is about challenging yourself, keeping your mind active, and taking action on your desire to learn and be creative.
WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Many cancer survivors report changes in the way they think, learn and remember things before, during and after treatment for the illness. Small tasks done with ease before a cancer diagnosis can become difficult afterwards.

There are many factors that can contribute to a loss of sharp thinking for cancer survivors, including age, the location of the cancer, stress or depression, sleep problems, and hormonal changes. Many studies have explored the link between certain cancer treatments and problems with memory and thinking.

The term “chemo brain” is used to describe foggy thinking and the difficulty with memory and concentration that survivors often describe after treatment for cancer, especially if the treatment involved chemotherapy drugs. While a definite cause is not known, the signs and symptoms of chemo brain are real and can seriously impact the quality of life for some cancer survivors.

The important thing to remember is that for many survivors, these problems get better with time. Nurturing your wellness in this area can:

• Teach you strategies to manage day-to-day tasks of life, work and school
• Help you expand your knowledge and skills
• Keep your mind active and stimulated
• Create new learning pathways in the brain
WHAT YOU CAN DO:

If you are interested in strengthening your thinking or “cognitive” skills, here are some things to consider:

1. **Use tools & technology to keep yourself organized.** Creating lists or using a daily planner can help you keep track of your daily activities. There are many free, or low-cost smartphone apps available to help you create lists, task and appointment reminders. Or, just writing it down may help.

2. **Take notes during a conversation or a meeting.**

3. **Exercise your brain.** Your brain is like a muscle and regular activities that are challenging, new and different can help create new learning pathways. Consider reading new and difficult material, or learning a new language or musical instrument. Choose activities that are interesting but do not add to your stress level.

4. **Crossword puzzles, Sudoku, or learning how to play chess are a few examples of games that challenge your thinking.**

5. **Get enough sleep.** Memory and thinking problems are made worse by a lack of sleep.

6. **Write more, or keep a journal of your thoughts and experiences.** This can also be a way for you to keep track of any memory problems that you are experiencing.

7. **Keep your body active.** Staying physically active helps all parts of your body, including your brain. Moving more will improve your mood, make you feel more alert and less tired.

8. **Try not to multi-task.** This is easier said than done in our busy lives, but focusing on one thing at a time can help.

9. **Practice “active listening” by repeating back information you just heard someone say.** (For example, “OK, so what you are saying is…”)

10. **Talk to your doctor or care team about your concerns.** Talking to your care team will help them evaluate possible treatment or support options. Some cancer treatment centers have specific programs to help survivors deal with thinking and memory problems.
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

• Am I getting enough sleep, and if not what can I do to improve my sleep habits?

• What new and interesting activity would I most enjoy doing?

• Is there a class I am interested in taking?

• Are there techniques I can use to help me concentrate better?

• What tools would work for me to keep track of events and tasks? Should I use a paper-based system or technology tool?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR OR CARE TEAM:

• Are my problems with thinking and memory something that can be treated medically?

• Can you refer me to a program to help with my thinking and memory problems?

• Are there other survivors I can talk to about their experiences and how they coped with similar problems?
After being diagnosed with breast cancer, public health professional and Norwell resident, Christina Nordstrom experienced a range of physical, emotional and cognitive effects both from the cancer and treatments. A gifted singer-songwriter, Chris turned to her creativity and passion for music to help her cope and to “exercise” her brain. Watch her perform the “Chemo Brain Blues,” a song she wrote for cancer survivors, and their friends and families to “lighten up this journey that we share together.”

http://tinyurl.com/ChemoBrainBlues

Ed O’Malley, PhD, an expert in neurofeedback and integrative sleep medicine, from Great Barrington, explains what “chemo brain” is, and talks about strategies cancer survivors can try to address the symptoms.

http://tinyurl.com/EO-ChemoBrain

According to the National Cancer Institute, upwards of 50% of cancer survivors report some trouble sleeping. Ed O’Malley, PhD, talks about the importance of sleep for improved brain wellness.

http://tinyurl.com/EO-Sleep
WORK WELLNESS

Carl Nickerson, Walpole
WHAT IT IS:

For many people, work is a very important part of daily life. It provides a sense of purpose, routine, and of course, a way to pay the bills. Cancer can present many work-life concerns.

Work wellness is about managing the job challenges that come up after a diagnosis, as well during and after your treatment. Each step of your cancer journey will present different questions to consider. You may wonder how to manage your work along with your care and recovery. In the wake of cancer, priorities sometimes shift and you may begin to think differently about the type of work you do and consider changes.

[ SURVIVOR STORY ]

Learn more about Carl’s wellness journey.

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

http://tinyurl.com/CarlNickerson

Young, strong, and healthy, Carl Nickerson was shocked when his doctor told him that he had testicular cancer. He worked as a freelancer in the accounting field when he was diagnosed. He worked as much as he could during his treatment, and he had an understanding employer. However, there was only so much they could do. As a contractor he lacked many of the safeguards and benefits that other employees enjoy. The financial stress added to the stress of the illness. Like other survivors, Carl made it through his treatment with a new perspective and determination to change things. He wanted a career, not just a paycheck. He wanted to help others protect themselves from the financial losses that can sometimes follow a cancer diagnosis.
**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

If you are interested in improving your work wellness, here are some tips to follow:

1. **Think about your physical and emotional health and what you will need to maintain your energy for work, treatment and recovery.** This is important if you continue to work during and after active treatment. Fatigue from cancer and treatment can make it difficult to maintain your energy. Side effects of treatment, such as “chemo brain” can impact your ability to perform work as you once did. Knowing when your energy is at its peak during the day, and what your limits are – even if they are only temporary – will help.

2. **Learn about your employer’s policies on health insurance, sick leave and other benefits that can help you with your health and healing.** If possible, ease back into work. Some employers have special programs to help cancer survivors balance their work-life responsibilities. Programs like short-and long-term disability insurance can help you with financial gaps that may occur because of your cancer care. Ask your supervisor or human resources department if there is a work-from-home option, or job-sharing programs that may help you manage the demands of your recovery and work.

3. **Educate yourself about the federal and state laws that help you manage your care needs and provide you with protection from workplace discrimination.** The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows unpaid leave to manage a serious illness that you, or a family member is experiencing. Leave can be taken all at once, or a few days at a time. Talk to your human resources department to see if your company is covered by the FMLA.

**WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:**

Improving your work wellness can:

- Help you identify what support you need to be successful at work at each stage of your cancer journey
- Guide you on how to manage relationships with your employer and co-workers
- Assist you in managing your work-life balance
- Help you manage stress from work
- Educate you on what your workplace and healthcare rights are
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF OR YOUR EMPLOYER:

- Do I feel strong enough, physically and emotionally to continue work during and after cancer treatment?
- Should I consider changing my job or career to try something different?
- What benefits or employee assistance programs does my employer offer that can help my wellness before, during and after cancer treatment?
- What reasonable changes can I ask my employer to make to help me do my job, or make going back to work easier?
- Where can I get help with financial difficulties, disability or health insurance questions?
- What are my rights at work under the ADA or FMLA?
- What information will I share with my co-workers and what boundaries will I set?

The Americans for Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with problems related to cancer against workplace discrimination. This law allows you ask your employer make reasonable changes to help you perform your work. Find out more about these laws by visiting our website: www.mass.gov/cancersurvivor

4. Think ahead about what to tell co-workers. If you need help from your employer in managing your care and work, you will need to provide some information about your health. However, for the most part, deciding what to tell co-workers about your diagnosis and treatment is a personal decision.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR OR CARE TEAM:

- What are your recommendations regarding work? Any limitations?
- If I feel as though I am disabled as a result of cancer or treatment, can you help me find a rehabilitation program or specialist to talk to?
Returning to work after active treatment can present challenges for cancer survivors. Hester Hill Schnipper, talks about some issues you should consider as you transition back to work after your treatment.

http://tinyurl.com/Returning2Work

Considering a change in career is common for cancer survivors. See how Belchertown resident Dawn Lapierre’s cancer experience provided her with a calling and a new vocation built around helping others improve their wellness.

http://tinyurl.com/DawnStrong