

Cancer

By Dr Julie Zepp Rutledge ND

The cancer statistics are alarmingly high. You likely hear of someone on virtually a daily basis who has been diagnosed with this frightening disease. So what can we do? How can we protect ourselves? How do we deal when a loved one is dealing with this diagnosis? How do we ourselves cope with our own diagnosis?

In this article I hope to provide you with some insight into cancer, from a holistic health care perspective, and some self-empowering tools you must implement into your life now – before or even following the possible fateful diagnosis.

The cancer process

In brief, cancer is cell division “gone mad”. In our bodies we have trillions of cells. Each cell has a specialized function – some are designed to contract (muscles cells), some are designed to carry nerve impulses (nerve cells), some are designed to produce messenger molecules; eliminate waste, take in nutrients, metabolize toxins, and so on. One exceedingly important class of cells in our bodies are the ones designed to protect us from foreign invaders (immune cells). The health of your immune cells is critically important in dealing with cancer.

If you consider how many cells your body is made up of, and how many complex functions they have – you can hopefully understand how important it is that the environment in which these cells live be as healthy as possible. If you think of a house filled with many people, the house itself needs to be kept clean and with good air flow. As soon as something in the house breaks down – for instance the windows get stuck shut/ the sanitation system no longer works – then one or more of the people inside run the risk of getting sick. When this happens, this sickness can very easily spread to other people in the house. In this case we might have a system in place to recognize a person being sick, open the windows, let fresh air in, move the person outside to rest and recover. In doing so, harmony and health are restored to the people in the house. This example is analogous to the function of the immune system in cleaning up our “house” – our body.

In the case of cancer, we have all of these trillions of cells in the body and anything can cause a “sickness” to set into one of these cells – it might be a destruction of the cell from an environmental toxin, a diet filled with processed foods, nutrient deficiencies, constant recurring stress, emotional toxins, etc. These “triggers” are known as “carcinogens” (cancer causing agents) and the scientific community recognizes that they will activate a gene within the cell called an “oncogene”. It is known that within certain families there exist more oncogenes for a specific type of cancer, therefore when a person from that family’s body has been overwhelmed with carcinogens, those cancer causing genes may be turned on and the cancer can begin to grow.

Each and every one of us has this process happening within us at any given moment. We are affected by absolutely everything in our environments in either a negative or positive way. Fortunately we have in place this wondrous system, called the immune system, that I alluded to earlier. This is the system that essentially patrols the body, looking for “cells gone bad” – and to put it simply, gobbles up or destroys those cells that no longer function as our body needs them to. It’s a “clean up” system. Much like a waste disposal division in a city, however, this system can too become overtaxed if the demands placed on it override its

ability to handle its responsibilities. If the capacity to react is exceeded, then disease will set in.

The more negative carcinogenic things/ ideas/ thoughts/ emotions, the more overwhelmed the system gets. And some people (those with a genetic tendency to cancer) are able to tolerate less than those with a different family history. So while it is important that EVERYONE be proactive in reducing risk for cancer, those with a family history must take particular care.

Keeping the pathology in mind when considering what we can do to help protect ourselves, our goals are twofold: 1) reducing our exposure to carcinogenic substances 2) keeping our immune system in top form.

Because each of these points is an article (book!) in and of themselves, the information included here is by no means inclusive.

1. Reducing our exposure to carcinogenic substances:

- a) Nutritional – what we put into our mouths is perhaps the easiest area of influence we have on reducing our risk for cancer development. Avoid cancer causing foods: processed foods (foods with artificial preservatives/ coloring agents/ flavor enhancers); refined foods – eg. white sugar, white flour (cancer cells love the sugar they get from these highly refined foods); foods that stress the liver (alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, soda pop, fatty/ greasy “junk” foods); non-organic meats/dairy and non-organic dairy products. Switch your diet to “whole” foods – I like to say “If you can imagine how Mother Nature gave it to us, you can eat it” (eg. an apple vs. a pop tart... which one can you imagine growing/ flowering?). This includes whole grains (rice, oats, millet, rye, barley, quinoa, etc), vegetables, fruits, organic meats and meat products, nuts and seeds. Emphasize lots of fresh water, pure juices without sugar added, herbal teas.
- b) Environmental – an author and “eco-theologian” by the name of Thomas Berry once asked: “How can we have healthy people on a sick planet?” . It is like going back to our example of the body, as a house, now on an earthly scale. If our earth is our “house” then it is our duty to keep it as clean and healthy as possible. One doesn’t need to become an activist, but for our own health and for the health of future generations, we must become proactive. Recently we have heard the negative impact of drinking from plastic bottles – well, plastics in general are carcinogenic for ourselves and for the Earth itself. Reduce your purchase of foods and beverages in plastic containers, take cloth grocery bags to the store with you. Walk, run, or bike to work. Garden, compost. Buy locally grown foods whenever possible (the transport of vegetables from California to our store shelves generates enormous amounts of pollution).
- c) Emotional – this is probably the most overlooked area in which we can exert a powerful influence on our health. It has been noted that individuals with psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, typically have a next to 0 rate of cancer. It is believed that (though to a pathological extent in these cases) these individuals are constantly expressing their emotions/ feelings that they do not remain dormant in the body and act as carcinogens. Those people the most disconnected from their emotions, those less likely to express their feelings (often working with cancer patients, they observe more often than not “I don’t know how I feel” and this was a central theme of their lives) are the ones that seem to have higher incidences of cancer. I am sure you all know how it feels to be deeply saddened about something,

and feel you mustn't express it and therefore suppress it. It is like a feeling of tension in the guts or in the throat. If this occurs too repeatedly, we get out of touch of the feeling in the first place, and it is buried in the body where it will act as a carcinogen. Resentment is another feeling, that if you experience this on a regular basis – for example the mom who does everything for her family and takes no time to nurture herself might become resentful of her family and angry towards others for not helping (though she rarely asks for help, wanting to “do it all” herself) might feel resentful most of the time. This block of energy will stimulate a cascade of potentially cancer-causing stress hormones.

2. Building the immune system: Of course ensuring proper immune function is vitally important. This is done through good nutrition, good hygiene – including “water, sunshine, fresh air and exercise”, reducing stress and workload, ensuring a minimum of 8 hours of quality sleep per night, taking sick days when feeling run down – in order to rest and recover. Eating foods that boost the immune system: garlic, oregano, onion, tumeric, green tea, reishi mushroom, and antioxidant rich fruits and vegetables.

This isn't to say that these strategies are fullproof in preventing cancer – what I am seeing as increasingly most important in your personal journey is the development of your spirit. In working on spiritual growth, acceptance and surrender, we learn that there is an ultimate plan in place for us. And though we may not have any clue what this might be or why cancer might be a part of this plan it is absolutely critical to surrender to your spiritual nature – to trust and have faith in your Source energy (be it God, the Great Spirit, Buddha, Allah... or a combination there of) that this is part of a Divine plan and there is teaching going on each step of this journey. When faced when impending death, I admit this would seem a daunting task. Which is why, more and more often, I am suggesting people delve into palliative teachings every day of their lives – whether faced directly with their own mortality or not. We are all, in fact, facing our mortality daily. There is not a single person that you know today, including yourself, that isn't going to die at some point. So why not begin the process of coming to terms with this fact now? In the Buddhist tradition it is taught to accept death in your healthiest days. Unfortunately in our culture – the living and dying are separated. We are isolated from the dying experience, which creates fear. To be with someone who is dying is a powerfully spiritual experience – there is a grace and acceptance that is incredible. If we all had the honor of witnessing this, perhaps we would not fear the process to the extent we do. As we learn to accept death as simply another transition in our lives, many of our daily worries and anxieties leave us and we are free to live our lives to their fullest. I often say – consider the “worst case scenario” – really consider it (rather than avoid the thought of it, like most people tend to do) and as you can become “okay” with that outcome you have really nothing left to fear and life becomes easy.

To close, you are a Divine being that is simply living your life as a human right now (you're in “Earth School” according to author and teacher Caroline Myss). Which means you will have human struggles that are meant to challenge you to become your highest self. As a human, you have been given a body that is your responsibility to care for as you walk your path on earth. This, in brief, means Water, Sunshine, Fresh Air, Exercise, Good Food and Healthy Relationships (with yourself and others). Commit yourself to self care because you NEED to not because you “should”.

For further assistance on your journey and some reading suggestions:

- *Beating Cancer with Nutrition* by Patrick Quillin
- *Cancer and the Lord's Prayer* by Greg Anderson
- *On Death and Dying* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
- *The Journey Home* by Kryon
- *The Power of Intention* by Wayne Dyer
- *The Power of Superfoods* by Sam Graci
- *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche
- *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise Hay