



**A
WHOLE PERSON
APPROACH**

Healing the Mind, Body and Spirit

**TO CANCER
CARE**

Wayne Jonas, MD and Jenny Leyh



About Dr. Wayne Jonas

Wayne Jonas, MD, is a board-certified practicing family physician, an expert in integrative health and health-care delivery, and a widely published scientific investigator. Additionally, Dr. Jonas is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Medical Corps of the United States Army. From 2001 to 2016, he was president and chief executive officer of Samueli Institute, a nonprofit medical research organization supporting the scientific investigation of healing processes in the areas of stress, pain, and resilience.

Dr. Jonas is currently the executive director of Samueli Foundation's Integrative Health Programs, an effort supported by Henry and Susan Samueli to empower patients and doctors by providing solutions that enhance healing, prevent disease, and relieve chronic pain.



About Jenny Leyh

Jenny Leyh is a communications consultant with a background in journalism. Diagnosed with breast cancer at 33, Jenny hit the pause button on her career to concentrate on healing while also raising a newborn. Now six years out of active treatment, Jenny is focused on empowerment, integrative health, and advocacy for patients.

Connect with Dr. Wayne Jonas

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Chemo. Radiation. Surgery.

This medical arsenal—designed to attack and kill cancer cells in the patient—is often first and foremost on the minds of those affected by cancer, and rightly so.

But what about the physical pain, emotional stress, side effects, and mental anxiety that accompanies the diagnosis, treatment, and even survival of cancer? These wounds are often lasting and difficult to address, but they can't be ignored. Where the curing leaves off, the healing begins.

An integrative approach goes beyond the typical treatment plan you receive from your oncologist. It combines conventional medicine with changes to lifestyle and behavior, and self-care for healing your mind, body, and spirit.

In this eBook, Dr. Wayne Jonas and I will share several factors of whole person care including: nutrition, exercise, pain management, sexual health, avoiding financial toxicity, finding support, spirituality and mental health, resources for teens and young adults, and life after cancer.

In strength and healing,
Jenny Leyh

Nutrition



What we put into our bodies is just as important as the medicine prescribed to attack the cancer cells.

The question, “What should I eat?” is common after a cancer diagnosis. It may be prompted by concern about side effects or the urge to take back some control, nourish the body and support healing.

“Eat what tastes good” is often the limited advice that patients receive as they go through cancer treatment. Oncologists see many patients lose their appetites or struggle with nausea. However, physicians receive little training in nutrition. Research shows many connections between the food we eat and cancer, and how what we put into our bodies is just as important as the medicine prescribed to attack the cancer cells. Simple changes such as adding more leafy greens into diet or eating healthier snacks throughout the day can have a big impact on one’s overall health.

Food can help heal the mind, body and spirit. It can convey the message “I care about you” from a caregiver and help people dealing with cancer focus on self-care. Foods that fight cancer and inflammation contribute to whole-person healing regardless of the ultimate treatment outcome.

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Exercise



Exercise is recommended even for those who have cancer. It can reduce pain and boost your energy levels.

Resting to conserve energy may seem like the right thing to do when you have cancer. After all, the body and mind are facing the stresses of diagnosis, treatment, and side effects. In the past, doctors did not generally recommend physical activity for people with cancer. But that has changed. Today, your treatment plan is much more likely to include some form of exercise.

You know your body best, so listen to it. Some days you will feel able to do more than others. If you are looking for ways to be active when you have cancer, the [American College of Sports Medicine](#) offers practical tips.

Aerobic endurance, strength, and flexibility are important benefits of being physically active during and after treatment. Endorphins released during exercise can reduce pain, while fresh air and solitude can provide a break from feeling like a patient rather than a person.

Yoga, Tai-Chi, and other gentle forms of exercise can restore and even boost energy. Today, physical movement is recommended to virtually everyone who is receiving treatment or is a cancer survivor.

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Pain Management



WAYNE JONAS, MD

Undertreating pain can be harmful to your healing process.

Medications are the most common solution offered for cancer pain. These may be over-the-counter pain medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) or strong prescription pain medications called opioids, such as oxycodone (OxyContin). Some medications can also help treat chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN).

You might be concerned that taking opioids will cause addiction. But this is not always true with cancer pain. In fact, undertreating pain because of fear of opioids might be more harmful for some than using them. If you have a history of drug or alcohol dependence, be sure to discuss it with your doctor before you start taking opioid medications. Read about the 3 Keys to Avoiding Opioid Dependency.

Medications are not your only option. Ask your doctor about ways to manage cancer pain using drugless solutions. **It's OK to think outside the box when it comes to cancer pain.**

Ask your care team about the following evidence-based ways to reduce pain to see if they are right for you:

- Massage • Guided Imagery • Breathwork • Meditation
- Music Therapy • Exercise • Acupuncture

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Cannabis



Cannabis is a welcome therapy to combat side effects.

Cannabis is a plant (botanical) substance that can help relieve symptoms of cancer and is used during its treatment. As of August 2022, more than 37 U.S. states and four U.S. territories allow medical use of cannabis products. Non-medical (recreational) use is legal in 18 states.

For many patients, the use of cannabis to combat some of the side effects of cancer treatment is a welcome therapy. Its use has been shown to be helpful for specific symptoms, including:

- Nausea, vomiting, and lack of appetite
- Pain from neuropathy (nerve problems)
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety

Talk with your oncologist or other health-care provider before trying cannabis. Start by listing the symptoms you'd like to improve. Then, you may want to ask the following questions:

- Who on my health-care team can help me learn more about using cannabis?
- How and where can I register to use medical cannabis? Is there someone on my health-care team who can help me register?
- Will using cannabis affect other health conditions besides my cancer symptoms? How?
- Is a different medication or approach safer or more effective?

To be used properly, cannabis should be used as part of a whole-person approach to cancer. While cannabis can help ease some of the side effects of cancer treatment, it should never be used as a cure for cancer.

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Sexual Health



Your sex life doesn't have to end when you are diagnosed with cancer. What's likely, though, is that it will change, just as it changes with other life events. Cancer has physical, mental, and emotional effects on your sex life. It's important to emotionally prepare for the changes that may occur and eventually adjust to the change that you have experienced because of cancer treatment.

How cancer affects sexuality

The cancer itself may affect your sexuality physically and emotionally, but often it is the treatment that has the largest impact on sexual function. Erectile dysfunction (ED) is often an immediate postoperative side effect of surgery for prostate cancer that may last 18 to 24 months post-surgery, but it may also happen before cancer treatment. For women, surgery that removes the uterus or ovaries, or chemotherapy and other medications, like aromatase inhibitors for breast cancer, can cause menopause and that will impact sexual health. Loss of breast tissue, nipples, and feeling in the breast area following a mastectomy can also impact sexuality. Radiation to the pelvis, surgical scars, gaining or losing weight, and even losing or growing hair all affect how your body feels and how you feel about it.

On an even deeper level, Jennifer Bires, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C, executive director of the Life with Cancer and Patient Experience department at Inova Schar Cancer Institute, says fatigue has a major effect on sexuality when you live with cancer. "Fatigue can be crushing at times," she says. "People with cancer are more likely to be depressed or anxious, which also lowers libido." If you are taking antidepressants as part of your treatment, you should know that these also can cause changes in desire, arousal, and orgasm.

The emotional impact of cancer can include "changes in your relationship, changes in roles for you and your partner, or changes in your interest and capacity to date or form new relationships," Bires says. Intimacy can be maintained even if there is a pause or change in sexual activity.

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Avoiding Financial Toxicity



If you or a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, how to cover the cost of treatment—even if you have insurance—can add stress to an already stressful time. Cancer and its treatment can have serious, sometimes lasting effects on your finances.

Here are some tips to help you assess your situation, spot financial pitfalls, and avoid what many health care providers call “financial toxicity:”

If you're insured, check out your benefits online.

Learn what your deductible, co-payments, co-insurance rate, and cancer care benefits are, and let your health care providers know.

Ask to talk with a financial counselor

(they are also called financial navigators) at the hospital, clinic, or cancer center where you will be treated. They can go over your insurance information, help you apply for public insurance if you need it, and help you find other ways to pay for care.

Talk with a social worker at the cancer center or clinic.

They can help you find low-cost or free options for everything from transportation to integrative care.

If you get Medicare, sign up for Part D

which helps with the cost of prescription drugs. You may want to purchase insurance that supplements Medicare, too. This can pay for things Medicare does not cover or pick up the remaining cost after Medicare pays their part.

Ask if group visits are available to access supportive services.

Some organizations offer free or reduced-fee acupuncture, nutrition counseling, exercise, or Zumba classes. Many services are available online.

You may be eligible for disability benefits.

The Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability program is an option for those who have paid into Social Security. Up to \$1,200 per month is available, and those who are dealing with cancer may have their application processed more quickly.

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Finding Support



It's important to recognize your needs and find the resources that will help you to get through treatment and beyond. Your provider or a patient navigator are there to help you find the support that you need.

Facing cancer's challenges alone is beyond most people's capacity. Seeking out community—a therapist, a friend or family member, a support group of others who have experienced similar trauma—is a crucial step in healing.

Your support needs may look different and that can change over time. Some patients find support groups helpful, while others don't want to spend too much time talking about their diagnosis. It's important to recognize your needs and find the resources that will help you to get through treatment and beyond. Your health care provider or a patient navigator are there to help you find the support that you need.

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Spirituality and Mental Health



When we talk about spiritual life, we usually mean a connection to something beyond ourselves—the higher power that 90 percent of Americans believe in. You can be spiritual whether or not you are also religious, belong to a faith group, or follow specific principles and beliefs. Spirituality and religion both help us answer the big questions of existence: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What matters?

Cancer and other serious illnesses tend to draw our attention to these questions. They focus our life. For that reason, many people with cancer say spirituality and religion—or faith—are particularly important during illness and treatment. Many studies show that having a spiritual or religious practice helps people with cancer cope with challenges from depression and anxiety to pain management and recovery.

A deepened connection to ourselves, whether through religion, spirituality or a mindfulness-based practice will help in navigating a serious medical trauma, such as cancer. Here are a few definitions to consider when we are talking about spirituality:

Mindfulness:

Presence in the here and now and acceptance of one's illness within the context of the world we live in physically.

Spirituality:

Existential concerns about life after death, what happens to one's soul, or will one see their loved ones again, etc.

Religious:

Social-cultural systems of designated beliefs, behaviors, morals, and practices that relate humanity to supernatural, transcendental, and spiritual elements.

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Supplements



Supplements can boost the immune system and reduce side effects.

How can supplements support cancer care? Some of the benefits of supplements include boosting the immune system, reducing side effects like nausea or fatigue, and helping to prevent recurrence.

A recent study found that between 60 and 80 percent of cancer patients take supplements before, during and after cancer treatment. While supplements may seem harmless, some, like St. John's Wort, can make chemotherapy less effective and increase skin problems from radiation therapy. Like any medications you take, you should always talk to your provider about any supplements you are taking.

Below is a list of supplements proven helpful for the chronic pain experienced by many cancer patients:

- avocado-soybean oil
- capsaicin
- curcumin (in foods)
- ginger, glucosamine
- melatonin
- polyunsaturated fatty acids
- vitamin D

Despite the fact that supplements are readily available over-the-counter or for purchase online, it is important to always consult your provider before introducing supplements into your health regimen.

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When Teens and Young Adults Have Cancer



Young adults can often feel left out at school and social events because of cancer's impact on their lifestyle.

According to the American Cancer Society, only about one in 20 people with cancer is a young adult aged 20–39. The broader category called “adolescents and young adults” includes people who are diagnosed with cancer between the ages of 15 and 39. It’s only natural to feel isolated in your journey with cancer when you are the youngest patient in the infusion center by about 20 years. Help and support are available, but you may need to look for it.

Health care providers and researchers know that adolescents and young adults, or AYAs, face unique challenges. These are mostly related to dealing with a disease during the life stages where you would normally focus on building your adult life through school or training, work, relationships, and family.

Jennifer Bires, MSW, LICSW, OSW-C, is a certified oncology social worker who specializes in working with adolescents and young adults. She is executive director of Life with Cancer and Patient Experience program at the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. She suggests each person ask the following questions of their health care providers:

- How will treatment impact my ability to work or go to school?
- What side effects should I expect, and how will they impact my quality of life?
- Will any of the treatments I am being prescribed impact my fertility?
- How can I reduce the risk of long-term side effects from treatment?

It can be hard to find information about prognosis since so few people are diagnosed as young adults, which may mean the statistics you can find online represent a group of patients who are typically diagnosed at a later stage in life. If this information is important to you, don’t be afraid to ask your doctor for more. There are also many organizations that provide resources for adolescents and young adults with cancer so don’t be afraid to look outside of your hospital system.

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Life After Cancer



This is an opportunity for you to advocate for yourself and create your own “treatment plan” for life after cancer.

At the onset of a cancer diagnosis, many patients are focused on the finish line when they can resume the life that they once knew. But many cancer survivors say that life after cancer in some ways can be filled with more challenges than that of the treatment phase. Life after cancer is an adjustment that takes time. That idea can feel impossible after all of the drugs, procedures, appointments, pain, and stress. Your mind and body have been through so much and it may be difficult to conceive a life beyond the trauma of a cancer diagnosis.

This is an opportunity for you to advocate for yourself and create your own “treatment plan” for life after cancer.

It is possible to go from ringing that bell to finding healing and wholeness as you establish your new normal after cancer. The saying that time heals all wounds is true in this case, try to take a deep breath and take it one day at a time.

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Managing cancer requires an approach in which all aspects of a person's life are considered.

– Wayne Jonas, MD

Whole-person cancer care utilizes complementary therapies to combat the side effects of cancer care and help restore the quality of life for our patients.

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drwaynejonas.com/whole-person-cancer-care/