



aggressive cancer treatment and to pray for health. In the Jewish tradition, *mikvah* immersion marks a transition from one state to another.



Humor Is a Powerful Tool

When pain and suffering are overwhelming, humor provides a way for us and our loved ones to join together in laughter and to help us transcend the pain and fear that we are feeling. A multicolored wig lets other people laugh with us about our baldness, and it tells everyone that we can joke about changes in appearance.

Develop a Metaphor for Survival

Visualization can help us find images that mobilize our own healing capabilities. For example, a long-term leukemia survivor envisioned her oncologist as the quarterback of a winning football team. Others describe their illness experience as a journey. Our metaphor or imagery will be uniquely our own.

Prepare Now for Changes That Occur

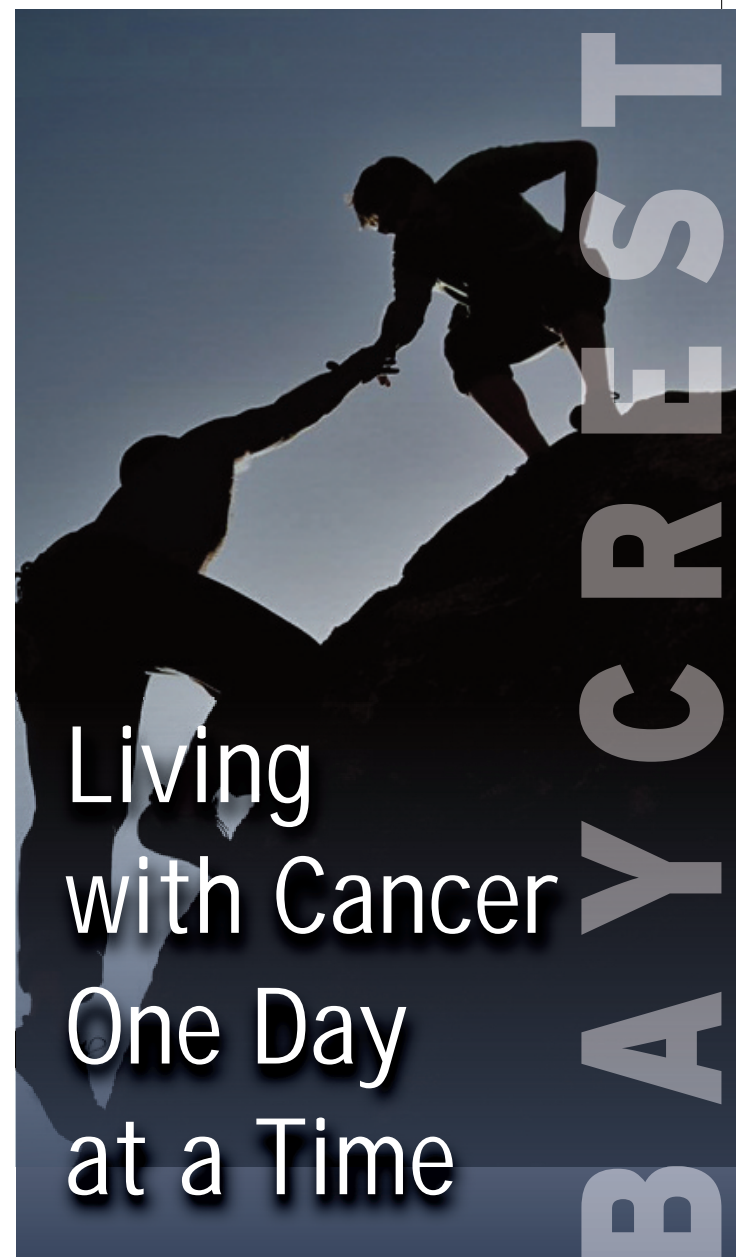
During the active phases of cancer treatment, we are involved in doing something positive to improve our health. However unpleasant or painful, our treatment constitutes an active effort to help us get well. When treatment is over, we may find that fears of cancer

recurrence or death are more intense than they were during treatment. This makes sense, because our total attention was previously taken up with treatment and we could not fully experience the emotional impact of our cancer diagnosis.

During the post-treatment phase, we will have much less contact with the people who were helping us. This occurs at the same time that we may feel more afraid and more in need of reassurance. The emotional support we found during cancer treatment will be just as important in the post-treatment period, and Jewish healing services and cancer support groups can help us deal with our fear and worry. We might also want to contact a rabbi or a therapist at this time.

Struggling with Meaning

Many people struggle to understand why they suddenly face a cancer diagnosis and its life-and-death implications. They wonder if they brought it upon themselves. But we can search for the meaning and positive value, without blaming ourselves. Living with cancer, even terminal cancer, can lead to a deep sense of self-acceptance and peace. The reality of facing life-and-death issues allows us to live fully in the present moment and open us to a new experience of spirituality. The present moment is all we have, no matter how much time is left, and living with cancer lets us deeply appreciate that moment.



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Life in Sharp Focus

There are few personal experiences more frightening than a cancer diagnosis. It brings life into sharp focus. Yesterday's concerns vanish, and daily responsibilities that we considered essential fade into the background. "Will I live?" "How can I get the best medical care?" "Will I be able to manage?" These responses emerge as the important questions. Judaism offers spiritual resources to help us live with cancer, whatever our diagnosis or the stage of our illness.

Let Helpful People Join In

How we communicate to others sets the tone for their responses to our illness. Letting them know about our medical situation and sharing our fear allows people to reach out and help us. Straight forward talk about our illness invites other people to join us in finding spiritual strength.

For those newly diagnosed with cancer, being on the receiving end of care and support may be a new experience. We may have to work at allowing ourselves to receive from others. In addition, no one person will provide all the help we need. Our spouse may be able to offer assistance and support in certain areas, but he or she is also suffering from shock and fear. One friend may offer to research medical

treatment, another may provide deep companionship, and a third may be a source of faith and optimism. Well-meaning friends or relatives who offer help that is not beneficial to us may leave us feeling misunderstood or angry. One of our roles in getting well is to receive each person's particular gifts.

Find a Cancer Support Group

Several studies show that support groups increase the longevity of participants who have metastatic cancer. They also provide help and connection with others. A support group provides a time and place to talk about concerns that will be understood by people going through similar experiences. Hospitals and cancer organizations, the local Jewish healing organization or Jewish Family Services may offer a variety of support groups. When searching for a support group, it's very important to find one in which the members have some commonality with your particular diagnosis and stage of illness.

Reach Out for Spiritual Allies

Our spiritual healing is as important as medical healing. Even a person with much inner strength needs external support in a time of great crisis. Our usual ways of coping with difficulties may not be sufficient to face the devastation of a cancer diagnosis. Seek out and build spiritual strength. Exploring Jewishness may become especially important at a time of illness. For many, illness triggers an intense search for help, support and meaning, and are thus primed for a renewed and revitalized Jewish involvement and identification.

Contact a Local Healing Service

Many congregations now offer healing services. A healing service offers deep spiritual support, unconditional acceptance of whatever

suffering or confusion we may feel. A Jewish healing service connects the resources of the Jewish tradition with the needs of Jews who are suffering. If there is no Jewish healing service nearby contact the National Center for Jewish Healing in New York City (212-399-2320).



Comfort in Prayer

Prayer heals in many ways. There is comfort in words spoken by Jews in the past. Prayer can help us contact our inner strength and faith. Prayer is calming and provides relief from the anxieties that worsen physical and mental pain. In addition to our own personal prayers we may want to make an audiotape of traditional prayers and songs to listen to daily throughout the rigors of treatment.

Jewish Ritual May Help

Jewish ritual can provide us with ways to set boundaries in time around our illness and healing experiences. For example, we may want to recite a Hebrew blessing before beginning each chemotherapy treatment and ask our medical team to join in. The few moments spent together in prayer can separate ordinary time from the initiation of a medical treatment.

Another example is immersion into the *mikvah* (the ritual bath) in order to mark the end of