

## Weight Management for the Cancer Survivor

Having difficulty losing or maintaining a healthy weight after finishing cancer treatment is one of the most common concerns that cancer survivors experience. Many people gain weight during or after cancer treatment due to disease- or treatment-related hormonal changes, decrease in physical activity, eating more “comfort” foods, poor sleep quality, increase in emotional and physical stress, and other factors. However, maintaining a healthy weight is important in decreasing your chance of developing cancer or other chronic illnesses, as well as promoting cancer survivorship.

Many people with weight gain or difficulty with weight loss can also struggle with poor self-esteem, depression and/or anxiety. These psychosocial effects can also affect your personal relationships, job performance, and day-to-day functioning.

### What steps can I take to manage my weight?

- Follow a schedule and don't skip any meals or snacks.
  - Preparing healthy meals in portions ahead of time will prevent you from reaching for unhealthy fast foods when you are hungry.
- Change your portions by using a smaller plate or bowl, which will make a smaller portion look bigger.
- Choose nourishing, naturally low-calorie foods, such as including a fruit/vegetable at every meal or snack.
  - Fiber and protein will help keep you full and help prevent overeating.
  - Balance your plate:
    - ½ of your plate should consist of vegetables and fruits (that are low in sugar content)
    - ¼ of your plate should be lean protein
    - ¼ of your plate should contain whole grains.
- Eat slowly and without distractions (e.g. phone, TV, computer).
  - Being able to eat slowly while focusing on what you're eating will allow you to be more in tune with when you are feeling full so that you do not overeat.
- Incorporate moderate exercise.
  - Exercise is one of the most effective ways to combat insomnia – cancer survivors should aim to do at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week. Aerobic or strength-building exercise is helpful to improve lean muscle mass and heart health.
  - Exercise regularly during the day time and avoid exercise two hours before bedtime.
- Make sure you get adequate sleep.
  - Set a regular sleep schedule (the same bedtime and wake time every day). Avoid naps during the day.
  - Avoid caffeine after lunch time.
  - Avoid alcohol near bedtime.

- Do not smoke or use nicotine-containing products (especially during the evening and at night).
- Keep your room quiet and dark. You can use a fan or white noise machine to help reduce noise.
- Avoid checking the time during the night. Avoid looking at your phone or TV. Avoid having a clock in the bedroom.
- Consider joining a support group for people with cancer. Talking about your journey of weight management with people who share the same difficulty can help you learn new ways to maintain a healthy weight.
- Stay connected. Keep in touch with friends and family and consider joining a support group for cancer survivors.

These are only some suggestions for managing your weight which is a common challenge among cancer survivors. However, if you are having a difficult time managing, please speak with your health care provider.

### **When Should You Call Your Healthcare Team?**

**If you experience any of the following, call your healthcare team:**

- Are losing weight unintentionally.
- Have heart palpitations, chest pain, shortness of breath, new tremors, lightheadedness, or dizziness.
- Are feeling more thirsty than normal or have been urinating more frequently than normal.
- Are so tired that you cannot do your daily activities like bathing, getting dressed, or eating.
- Have thoughts of hurting yourself or others.