

About you: Care after cancer

Survivorship newsletter

Spring 2025



Ascension



Inside this issue

Survivorship story: Featuring DonnaLee.H, breast cancer survivor Page 2

Cancer prevention and wellness: Your Guide To Self Breast Exams Page 4

Time To Eat: Let's Talk About Produce Page 6

Cancer Survivorship: Supporting Your Health Through Cancer Survivorship Page 9

Within the community Page 11

Survivorship Story

DonnaLee H., Breast Cancer Survivor

The following story is in the patient's own words.

My cancer journey started in early 2000 when I was 41 years old and experienced discharge from my right breast. While a mammogram didn't show anything, my primary doctor ordered additional testing which showed a blockage in one of my milk ducts. A few weeks later I had exploratory surgery to find out what was going on. The morning of the surgery I woke up with Bible verses going through my mind that I had memorized years before. The verses were from Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.



Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." That gave me peace to go into surgery knowing that the outcome was in God's hand, no matter what was found.

A polyp was discovered to be the cause of the bleeding, but the surgeon saw something just beyond the polyp which turned out to be DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ). Testing showed they did not get clear margins and I had additional surgery two weeks later, which also resulted in no clear margin. While at that time it was customary to not have any further treatment my husband and I decided to have 6 weeks of radiation as our children were 6 and 10 years old, as well as 5 years of Tamoxifen as an estrogen suppressor.

Hearing the words, "you have breast cancer" is a strange thing. For several weeks the phrase, "I have breast cancer" ran around in my brain on repeat, but with the emphasis on a different word of the phrase each time. There were also many hard conversations. One was telling my parents, since my Dad had been diagnosed with advanced bladder cancer and had endured years of complications. The one that struck my heart the hardest was our 10 year old daughter asking me if she now had a higher chance of having breast cancer when she was older. I told her that her doctors would probably watch her more carefully, which has turned out to be the case.

Radiation was hard! Having a fair complexion, I burned pretty badly, which took months to heal. It also zapped my energy level and was compounded by being diagnosed with mono shortly before radiation started. Fortunately, my radiation was scheduled for early morning and my husband's employer allowed him to adjust his schedule so he could care for our children while I was having my treatment. Our church family also stepped in and provided meals and cleaned our home several times. My Mother-in-Love also came over a couple afternoons a week to watch our kids so I could nap.

In September, 2001 I had a total hysterectomy due to a combination of health concerns, including the impact of the Tamoxifen on my uterus. This had the side benefit of drastically reducing the amount of estrogen my body produced, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Sometimes we don't see God's hand in our circumstances for many years.

Fast forward to the fall of 2022, when I was 64. While my right breast had felt lumpy due to the scar tissue from surgery and radiation, something felt "off". I scheduled an appointment with my primary doctor who ordered a mammogram and ultrasound. I was able to have them performed within a week, followed by a needle biopsy a few days later. Once again I heard the words, "you have breast cancer". An MRI was unable to determine if the tumor had invaded the chest wall. We chose to obtain two opinions for treatment through the various Ascension providers. Everyone on both teams were very helpful to explain their treatment plans and answer all our questions. We chose a treatment plan of chemotherapy to reduce the tumor and hopefully, avoid the need for additional radiation. During this time one friend brought her kids over to our home while I was at work and put up our Christmas tree and all the indoor decorations. What a blessing.

Another blessing was being treated by Dr. Jonathan Treismann, the same medical oncologist I had for my first diagnosis. Genetic testing showed the tumor was 100% estrogen receptive and was very slow growing due to the limited amount of estrogen my body produced. There's that unexpected blessing of the hysterectomy! In early January, 2023, I started a 4 month schedule of Verzenio, along with an estrogen suppressor.

Families from our church signed up to pray for us and provide a meal a week during the 16 weeks of chemo, but the meals were large enough to cover several dinners. This was so helpful, as the chemo and its side effects left me with barely enough energy to get through stressful work days. One day I was discouraged by feeling like I didn't even have the energy to pray. In answer, God brought to mind Exodus 17 where the Israelites were in battle and they were winning while Moses held up his staff. If he lowered his arm, the battle would go the other way, but Aaron and Hur stepped in and held his arms up for him. I felt like God was telling me that there were other people praying for me, even when I couldn't and it was okay to give myself some grace and just do what I could manage.

A follow-up MRI after the chemo showed the tumor had shrunk, but there was still a question of if the chest wall tissue was involved. We wouldn't know the final answer on radiation until after surgery. Between the end of chemo and surgery, we were gifted a weeklong trip to Hawaii with some family members. It was an amazing time of rest, a little bit of normalcy, and enjoying God's amazing creation. In June, 2023, Dr. Christina Golner at Ascension Franklin performed a mastectomy. Fortunately, testing showed that there was no lymph node involvement, and she only had to take a small amount of chest wall tissue to ensure there were clear margins. I was very blessed to have my sister, who is a Physician Assistant, come for three weeks to help with my recovery., followed by our daughter, who came for another two weeks from out of state. Our son lives close by and was also a big help and encouragement throughout.

In January, 2024 I had DIEP flap reconstruction at Elmbrook Hospital. This involved taking tissue from my abdomen to create a new breast. The recovery from this surgery was in many respects harder than the mastectomy, as there was a lot more healing that needed to take place from the multiple incisions. For both the mastectomy and the reconstruction, one of the most helpful things was having Occupational Therapy, which was never mentioned back in 2000. With the help of Kimberly Bohmann at Ascension Franklin, I was able to regain strength and range of motion that was even better than before surgery, as well as overcome some lymphedema.

I currently have 6 month follow-up appointments and will be taking the Anastrozole for another couple years. So far, everything has been clear. I plan to live my life to the fullest but I know whatever the future holds I can rely on God to get me through. As it says in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Ascension has a number of programs and ways to help cancer survivors to thrive. If you haven't taken advantage of them, I would encourage you to look into them.



***Submit your
cancer story to
be included in
our newsletter***

Cancer Prevention and Wellness

Breast Awareness: Your Guide To Self Breast Exams



Michelle Bregenzer

WHCNP-BC

Michelle Bregenzer has been working in oncology for 30 years. She has always loved nursing and wanted to be a nurse since kindergarten. Michelle was a nurse for about ten years, until she went on to get her Masters of Nursing as a Nurse Practitioner.

In Michelle's free time she enjoys walking, reading and spending time with her family. She has been married to her high school sweetheart for 43 years and has two children and five grandchildren.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide, excluding skin cancer. Incidence of breast cancer is even rising in younger women. Despite this, many women under the age of 40 have not had their routine mammogram yet.

Self Breast Examination Instructions:

It is important to be aware of the signs, symptoms, and prevention measures for breast cancer. If you notice any of the below symptoms, see a healthcare professional promptly.

1. Begin by looking at your breast in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your hands on your hips
 - Make sure that your breasts are their usual size, shape and color. Breasts should be evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling.
 - If you see any dimpling, puckering or bulging of the skin, a nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple, any redness, soreness, rash or swelling you should bring this to your clinician's attention.
2. Next, look for the same changes with you arms over your head.
3. Next, lie down and using your right hand feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a sweeping motion up and down and then side to side, kind of like mowing the lawn. Apply medium pressure and feel for any unusual lumps, bumps or pain. Make sure you feel up into your armpits and along the sides of your breasts as well.
4. Gently squeeze your nipples to assess for any discharge.

You should perform a self breast exam, at least once a month at different times so that you can get to know your breasts at different times of your cycle especially if you are still having your periods. Always discuss any concerns or questions you have about your breast health with your clinician.

Signs and symptoms of breast cancer:

- A lump or thickening in the breast tissue
- Changes in the size or shape of the breast
- Skin changes, such as redness, swelling, or dimpling
- Nipple discharge that is bloody, clear, or thick
- Pain in the breast or armpit

Risk Factors:

- Age (risk increases with age)
- Family history of breast cancer
- Dense breast tissue
- Early menstruation
- Late menopause
- Hormonal factors (e.g., birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy)

Prevention:

- Regular breast exams by a healthcare professional
- Mammography screenings (for women over 40)
- Healthy lifestyle (exercise, healthy diet, avoid smoking)
- Limit alcohol consumption

If you have any questions or concerns you should reach out to your provider.



Time To Eat

Let's Talk About Produce

By: Wendy Balister, RD, CD

Nutrition Recommendations for cancer prevention and survivorship include eating lots of fruits and vegetables! **The American Cancer Society recommends eating a variety of these foods every day.** These foods contain important vitamins, minerals, fiber and other healthful plant components. On average, most health organizations suggest children and adults should aim to consume 4 to 5 cups of fruits and vegetables daily, but most people fall short of that goal. All forms of fruits and vegetables, including canned, fresh, frozen and dried, count toward the recommendation.



Here are some tips on preparing vegetables

Eat Raw

- This is obviously a very simple and quick consideration
- Fresh vegetable salads are especially nutrient dense (packed with a variety of vitamins and minerals) when using greens such as kale or spinach
- Enjoy raw vegetables with a tasty dip such as hummus
- In addition to the usual vegetables we often eat raw (carrots, celery and cucumbers) consider bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, snap peas and radishes

Roast

- Roasting is another fairly simple way to prepare vegetables
- Preheat oven to 425 F (this temperature is appropriate for most vegetables)
- Wash and chop vegetables into desired pieces
- Place chopped veggies on a baking tray which has been lightly coated with canola oil
- Season (options to add flavor include basil, thyme, oregano, rosemary, garlic powder, lemon juice, black pepper and red pepper flakes)
- Roasting time depends on the type of vegetable and quantity, along with desired crispness
 - Beets, potatoes or carrots may take 30-45 minutes
 - Broccoli, cauliflower and brussels sprouts may take 15-25 minutes
 - Thin vegetables such as asparagus or green beans require less time, 10-20 minutes

Reference:

American Institute for Cancer Research (2024). Healthy Eating. www.aicr.org/cancer-prevention/healthy-eating/

Saut`e

- This method works well for delicate vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, leafy greens, mushrooms, etc.
- Heat a skillet over medium high heat
- Add a little bit of canola oil to the skillet once hot
- Add washed chopped vegetables
- Add spices or seasonings
- Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are tender

Now let's not forget about fruits

Eat Raw

- Have your favorite fruits available for snacking, adding a healthy fruit dip can make for an extra sweet treat
- Try cutting your fruit into different sizes or shapes to change things up - for example, apple slices are great for dipping and apple cubes can be a good shape to add to salads

Bake

- Baking fruit in the oven results in a delicious soft and sweet treat
- Enjoy baked fruit on top of yogurt, ice cream, oatmeal or as is
- Baking is great for fruits like peaches, apples and pears
- Preheat oven to 350 F
- Cut fruit or leave whole depending on what you are preparing
- Place fruit onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper
- Sprinkle with cinnamon
- Bake for about 15-20 minutes, until fruit is warm and juicy

Question : Are frozen and canned fruits and vegetables less healthy?

Answer: Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables can be as nutritious as fresh produce

Frozen fruits and vegetables are nutrient dense

- Produce that is frozen is often picked at peak ripeness, which is when the fruit or vegetable contains maximum nutrient content.
- Fresh produce is often picked before it is ripe relating to shipping, so it may not reach peak nutrient level.

Canned and frozen produce may be less expensive and sometimes easier to access compared to fresh, allowing you to increase your daily intake

It may be difficult to find certain types of produce in the grocery store depending on the season. For instance, finding good quality, fresh berries or fresh melons in the middle of the winter can be difficult. Fruit not in season can be expensive also. Frozen and canned produce can be found all year long.

- Tip for buying frozen and canned produce: Check the label for added syrups, sugars, or salt. Look for 100% fruit per the label. When buying canned vegetables, choose low-sodium or no-salt-added options. If those aren't available, rinsing before use can help reduce the salt content.

Healthy Chocolate Fruit Dip

Author: Nicole Hunn

Servings: 6 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 ounce dark or semi sweet chocolate chopped
- 1 cup plain lowfat greek style yogurt at room temperature
- 3 TBSP unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 TBSP honey
- ½ TSP pure vanilla extract
- Cut fresh fruit



Directions:

1. Place the chopped chocolate in a small heat safe bowl and melt in the microwave in 30 second bursts. Set aside to cool.
2. In a medium bowl, add yogurt, cocoa powder, honey and vanilla, whisk until smooth.
3. Add the melted chocolate and whisk until well combined.
4. Cover the bowl and chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

Cancer Survivorship

Supporting Your Life Through Cancer Survivorship



Riann Collar

PA-C

Riann Collar, PA-C, is a physician assistant with Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin. Riann provides cancer risk reduction and survivorship care for patients at high-risk of developing cancer or who have had cancer in the past. Riann has a special interest in wellness and disease prevention. She uses active listening to better understand each patient and deliver patient-centered care, empowering patients to improve their health.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be a difficult and scary time, however, nearing the end of cancer treatment can also cause new & unexpected feelings and emotions. Hopefully these tips below will help you throughout your survivorship journey.

- Follow up care is important!
 - Continue attending office visits and testing that is recommended by your care team.
 - If a survivorship care plan has not been shared with you, inquire if you can get a copy of your survivorship care plan, have your provider go over this care plan with you, and ask any questions you may have along the way.
 - Talk to your healthcare team about any ongoing side effects or possible late effects from your treatment
- Stay up to date on additional cancer screenings
 - Discuss with your provider what additional cancer screenings you should be completing and how often.
- Utilize resources and support
 - Connect with a local support group
 - Ascension Wisconsin survivorship resources



- Livestrong Program at the YMCA
- Ask your team for additional resources and local support

- Have healthy habits
 - Avoid all tobacco and nicotine products
 - Get proper sleep
 - Avoid or limit alcohol consumption
 - Focus eating plant based nutrition (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds) and limiting processed foods
 - Engage in regular physical activity (as guided by your care team)
 - Have healthy habits for managing stress (deep breathing, meditation, talking to loved ones, counseling, etc)

- Talk to your family members about your diagnosis and details (age you were diagnosed, your treatment details, any genetic testing) if you feel comfortable sharing
 - Knowledge of family history and sharing this history with their medical providers is very important because it may change recommendations, such as additional or earlier cancer screenings for family members.

Examples of at home resistance band exercises

Band Pull Aparts:

Hold a resistance band in front of you with a grip slightly wider than shoulder-width. Keep your arms mostly straight with just a tiny bend in the elbows. Ensure your elbows are pointed outwards. Pull the band apart horizontally until the band comes into contact with your chest and your hands are in-line with your body. Squeeze your shoulder blades together as you pull the band apart. Pause for a brief moment, focusing on the contraction in your upper back, and then slowly return to the starting position.

Standing Rows:

Attach the resistance band to a fixed point such as a railing, pole or a closed door handle, ensuring it's well secured. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms outstretched at waist height. Breathe out as you pull the resistance band towards you, keeping your elbows and hands at waist height. Make sure your back doesn't move, and look straight ahead. Keep neck and shoulders relaxed to avoid your shoulders lifting up. Slowly and with control return to the starting position. Repeat.

Shoulder Presses

Stand with both feet on the resistance band, with one end on the ground and the other end in the working hand. Press the band over your head. You may do this with your elbow directly in front or bent at 90 degrees to the side.



***Have a question?
We invite you to submit
your questions by
scanning the QR code.***

Within The Community

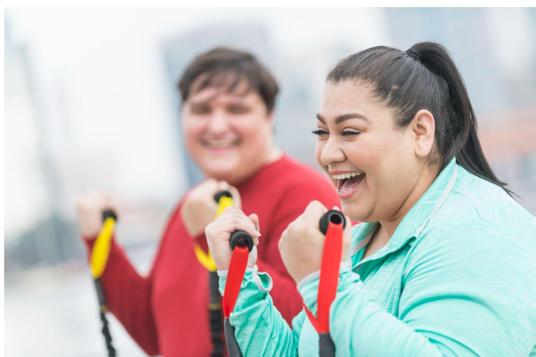
Support Groups and Programs

Racine

- **Multiple Myeloma Support Group (Hybrid)**
Meets the second Monday of each month from 6:30-8 p.m. in the Cancer Center Conference Room at Ascension All Saints Hospital. *For more information, contact Sarah Jurkiewicz sewi@IMFsupport.org*
- **Prostate Cancer Support Group (In person)**
Meets the fourth Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7 p.m. in the Cancer Center Conference Room at Ascension All Saints Hospital. No Meeting in July or December. *For more information, contact Annette Matera 262-687-8597 or annette.matera@ascension.org*
- **Fit To Fight (In person)**
A exercise program for patients currently undergoing cancer treatment, or cancer survivors who have recently completed treatments in our Ascension Wisconsin Cancer Care Centers. Classes are twice weekly. Patients receiving care through the Ascension Wisconsin Cancer Center may qualify for a scholarship: Includes a 3 month membership for the cancer patient and 1 support person. *For more information or to register: please call 262-687-4377*



- **Yoga Connection - All Saints (In person)**
Eight week yoga class that is designed for cancer survivors at any stage, and if desired, a support person. The yoga sessions include: gentle stretching, low impact and restorative poses, relaxation techniques and guided meditation and breathwork. *For more information, scan the QR code below or contact Kayla Thorne at kayla.thorne@ascension.org or 414-212-5171.*



Within The Community

Support Groups and Programs

Fox Valley

- **The Cancer Support Group (In person)**
Patients and any support individuals able to attend this support group at Ascension St. Elizabeth in the Helen Fowler Board Room. This support group meets the first Monday of each month from 6-7 p.m. No Meeting in July or December. *For more information, contact Heather.Roesch@ascension.org or carrie.olm@ascension.org*
- **A Time To Heal (In person)**
A FREE 9-week program designed to help cancer survivors of any cancer diagnosis regain their physical, emotional, and spiritual health after cancer treatment. During this program you will work with trained facilitators and meet others who understand your journey. These weekly sessions provide evidence based advice on topics including nutrition, exercise, building resilience, and moving forward in the face of fear. *For more information, contact kayla.thorne@ascension.org*



- **Journey to Wellness (In person)**
Meets the first Wednesday of each month from 10-11 a.m. at the Chapel of Reiman Cancer Center. *For more information, contact biannca.kramer@ascension.org*
- **Coping with Cancer Support Group (In person)**
Meets the third Tuesday of each month from 12:00-1 p.m. in the first floor lobby conference room. *For more information, contact Amanda Hanson 262-780-4255 or amanda.hanson1@ascension.org*
- **Prostate Support Group (In person)**
Meets the fourth Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7 p.m. in the fifth floor Conference Room 5B. No Meeting in July or December. *For more information, contact Leanne Walz leanne.walz@ascension.org*
- **Ostomy Support Group (In person)**
Meets the first Thursday of each month from 10:00-11 a.m in the fifth floor conference room A/B. For those who have a colostomy, ileostomy, urostomy or are anticipating ostomy surgery. Please RSVP by Monday the week of the meeting to Ashley Szmanda. For more information, contact Ashley Szmanda 414-447-2146 or ashley.szmanda@ascension.org.
- **Yoga Connection - SE Mayfair Road (In person)**
Eight week yoga class that is designed for cancer survivors at any stage, and if desired, a support person. The yoga sessions include: gentle stretching, low impact and restorative poses, relaxation techniques and guided meditation and breathwork. Spring session will start April 21st on Mondays and Fridays. Registration is required. *For more information, contact Leanne Walz at 414-256-1955 or Amanda Hanson at 262-780-4255*

Within The Community

NEW Support Groups and Programs

Milwaukee

- **Breast Cancer Support Group (In person)**
Meets the second Thursday of each month from 12-1 p.m. in the radiation oncology department, garden level. *For more information, contact Paula Weckman at paula.weckman@ascension.org or 414-206-3966.*
- **General Cancer Support Group (In person)**
Meets the fourth Monday of the month from 12-1 p.m in the Radiation Oncology Department, garden level. *For more information, contact Beth Garbe at elizabeth.garbe@ascension.org or 414-585-1548.*



Virtual Education

- **[Head and Neck Cancer Pre-recorded Educational Series](#)**
A comprehensive virtual pre-recorded educational series for individuals diagnosed with head and neck cancers. The topics are adapted to address the specific need of cancer patients/survivors with head and neck cancers. You may register to watch part or all of this series. Scan the QR code below to learn more or to register.



- **[Healthy Eating Active Living Pre-recorded Educational Series](#)**
A pre-recorded educational series that covers topics in cancer survivorship related to exercise, lymphedema, nutrition, and more! If you have any questions, please contact Ascension Wisconsin's Cancer Prevention/Wellness and Survivorship Nurse Coordinator: Kayla Thorne at kayla.thorne@ascension.org or (414)-212-5171. Scan the QR code to learn more or to register.



Within The Community

Cancer Survivorship Educational Health Fair

May 17th, 2025

At Ascension Wisconsin, we follow the National Cancer Institute's definition of a cancer survivor—any individual from diagnosis through the rest of life, including those living with or free of cancer.

As a National Cancer Survivor Day® event, we celebrate survivors, inspire those recently diagnosed, offer support to families, and engage the community.

Who is invited? This event is open to Ascension and non-Ascension cancer patients, survivors and their families, and friends.

When is it? May 17th, 2025 from 9:00am -1:00pm

Where to go: Ascension SE Wisconsin-Mayfair Road | 201 N Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa



What To Expect

Join us for breakout sessions led by clinical experts who will share valuable insights on cancer survivorship. Connect with both Ascension Wisconsin and local community resources at booths offering information on a range of topics for all cancer types, including lymphedema, exercise and diet, financial services, and more.

Enjoy light refreshments while celebrating life, finding inspiration for hope, and coming together for support with families.

To learn more, view the agenda or to register, please scan the QR code. Registration is not required, but requested



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