Survivorship & Nutrition—Part 1

Guest columnist Maura Harrigan, MS, RD, is the nutritionist in the Connecticut Challenge Cancer Survivorship Clinic at Yale Cancer Center.

Background

The cancer survivors referred to our Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic are highly motivated to learn about food choices to improve their treatment outcomes and quality of life. Each person receives an individualized nutrition care plan based upon their medical history, socio-economic status and nutrition savvy. To complete the nutrition assessment, the overlay of the cancer survivor’s emotional relationship with food needs to be ascertained. Some patients worry their customary diet caused the cancer, others fear consumption of certain foods will trigger a return, still others have had a lifelong struggle with weight and body image. All taken into account, a nutrition plan is honed based upon the following recommendations:

- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Eat a predominately plant-based diet
- Eat a rainbow of colors
- Limit consumption of processed and red meats to once a month
- Emphasize omega-3 fatty acids
- Observe food safety practices
- Limit consumption of alcohol

We’ll explore each of these further, some in this issue, the remaining next month.

Achieve and maintain a healthy weight

We emphasize energy balance (calorie intake vs. activity) rather than prescribing a calculated calorie diet. This is supported by our clinic model where the patient also sees the physical therapist, who addresses activity needs. A slow rate of weight loss (no more than 2 pounds a week) to reduce weight by 5% to 10% can confer survival benefits.

How and when one eats is just as important as what one eats. A haphazard eating style foils the best of intentions. We take much care to map out a schedule to align eating with the daily routine. Matching the fueling of the body to its activity sustains the metabolic rate, which enables better weight control. Eating smaller, more frequent meals also promotes better blood glucose control helping with fatigue, mood swings, and sweet cravings.

Eat a predominately plant-based diet

This is a simple and elegant approach. Eating as our ancestors did naturally provides a high fiber (>30 grams a day), low total fat (<30% total calories), limited trans fatty acids (<3% total calories), low saturated fats (<10% total calories), low sodium (< 2000 mg) and an appropriate amount of protein (0.8 gram/kg).

Eat a rainbow of colors

Each color represents a different constellation of vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients packaged by nature to act in synergy. Eating at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day as whole foods has a potency not found in use of supplements.

Emphasize omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 sources (salmon, eggs fortified with omega-3, flaxseed, fish oil supplement) may have specific benefits for cancer survivors, perhaps including reducing cachexia.

Come back for Part 2, next month.
In the News

- World's Biggest Event On Pain Calls For Palliative Care To Be Made A Human Right
- Donation season ends on September 26 for the Connecticut Challenge, which supports survivorship clinical, educational, and research initiatives. Please donate to one of the following teams: the Yale Cancer Center team, the HEROS pediatric survivor clinic team, the Yale School of Nursing team, or the Yale Bulldogs racing team.

Journal Watch

- The August 10 issue of Journal of Clinical Oncology is devoted to supportive oncology and palliative care. Topics include pain, dyspnea, nausea & vomiting, fatigue, depression.

Continuing Education

Yale

- Schwartz Rounds resumes in September. Watch for the announcement.
- Yale Bioethics Center’s End of Life Issues Study Group resumes monthly presentations. This year’s theme is Issues of Justice in End of Life Care. 5:30pm, 77 Prospect Street, Rm B012.
  - Sep 9 David H. Smith: Overview of the Concepts of Justice in End of Life Care
  - Oct 7 Ruth McCorkle: Hidden Emotional, Economic, and Physical Costs to Caregivers & Effective Interventions on Their Behalf
- Oct 4, 7:30am – 2:15pm. Oncology Nursing Council Fall Symposium: Challenges in Adult Oncology Nursing Practice. Compelling topics, nationally known speakers. Info: Jamy Stenger at jamy.stenger@ynhh.org or (203) 688-6437.

Connecticut

- Sep 11, 10:30am – 2:00pm. CT Coalition to Improve End-of-Life Care 10th Anniversary Celebration & Meeting. Keynote: Linda Pellico: “Third Person Observant or First Person Present.” Middletown.

Elsewhere

- Sep 12. Eastern Pain Association Annual Meeting. New York City
- Sep 12 – 13. 2nd Annual Pediatric Palliative Care Conference. Washington, DC

Online

- ONS Site-Specific Cancer Series: Breast Cancer Online Course. (20 CNE)
- End-of-Life Care: Improving Communication Skills to Enhance Palliative Care (Medscape; CNE)
- Management of Opioid-Induced Side Effects (Medscape; CME, CNE)
- Acute Pain Management: Overcoming Barriers and Enhancing Treatment (Medscape; CNE, CME, CPE)