What Fitness Gives Me

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I was diagnosed with smoldering myeloma 11 years ago. I'm now in my 40s. My cancer is treatable but not currently curable.

I understand all too well the adjustments needed to figure out this new normal. When you have cancer, the conversation involves some deep considerations. Beyond the needles and infusions and the stress, there's the question: How do I live the most powerful and best "me" with cancer? Is cancer a beginning or an end?

I decided to take a fitness approach. I knew that to keep a normal life and do better, even as my body was adjusting to multiple medications, I had to gain a bit of control. It's easier said than done, but I needed to steer this beast.

When I was in treatment and felt up to it, I made it to the gym twice a week to do weight training or cardio. I was doing something positive that worked hand in hand with my treatment. I never was hard on myself when I took a break, but when I didn't, I saw the difference.

There were days I had joint pain and swelling due to medications and myeloma. But by performing slight joint movements, I felt better as I rebuilt my strength.

My experience seeking to comfortably work out without feeling defeated led me to become a certified fitness coach. I work mostly with clients who have chronic conditions, including cancer. Many are scared of a fitness routine. I show them how to use exercise to reduce fatigue, improve balance, ease anxiety, boost mood, lower blood pressure, enhance circulation and manage weight.

It's important to have a realistic conversation with your oncology team about the correct fitness path for you. Yes, things can go wrong if you don't know what you're doing. I take many meds, including steroids, which can weaken bones, and I've had a few lesions on my spine (fortunately, small ones), so I'm not lifting any 100-pound weights. But my oncologist gave me the green light to lift smaller weights, with precautions.

I help my clients tailor their routines too. I help them understand that a well-structured fitness plan

helps them take control of their current situation, even when it feels uncontrollable. I help them tune in to what their bodies need—indeed, crave.

I start each day asking myself, “How do I feel today?” and “What do I want to accomplish today?” It gets me taking the right steps, doing what I need to do—even when I don’t want to be bothered. I focus on mini-goals—for myself and for my clients. If I can do circuit training of arms and legs in 20 to 30 minutes, that’s a good start.

You have to use what you have to get where you need to be. Here’s my motto: “The time to fight is now, with integrity, grace, hope and a smile…when you feel like it.”

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