Women: Take Time for Self-Care. You're Worth It!

Essentially, cancer prevention and control is about wellness—a dynamic process of working toward a more balanced and healthy lifestyle

June 18, 2018 By Teri L. Larkins

My late grandmother, Ms. Anne E. Larkins, was an accomplished elementary school principal and teacher when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in the spring of 1983. In her typical solutions-focused way, she sought to understand the disease and how best to manage it. She modeled steps a cancer survivor must take to live a longer, healthier life.

She took action to modify her lifestyle and behavior and was able to rely on her family and peers for emotional and caregiving support. She stopped smoking, began eating more plant-based, whole foods, and continued her active lifestyle. I have fond memories of us shopping and enjoying life outdoors. I remember one occasion in 1988 when we were playing an exercise video game. Together with her best friend, Ms. Lucille, and her granddaughter, we took time to care for ourselves to nurture our health and wellness.

Wellness: A Personal Journey and a Professional Passion

Having a family health history of breast cancer on both sides of my family inspired me to pursue a career dedicated to preventing and controlling cancer. My career and my life's purpose are focused on helping girls and women create lifestyles led by healthy choices.

These lessons resonated with me throughout my life, and I am happy to apply them at home and work to be proactive and reduce my own cancer risk. At age 26, I had a breast biopsy and enlarged lymph nodes removed from the right axillary area of my breast. Between 2006 and 2016, four close (first and second degree) relatives on my mother's side of the family were diagnosed with breast cancer.

This prompted me to gather and keep records of my health history. I also talked with my health care team about getting tested for gene mutations such as BRCA. My results for BRCA 1 and 2 mutations were negative. I've learned in my work with CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program and Colorectal Cancer Control Program that screening and finding cancer early help reduce the cases of and deaths caused by cancer. As I have been inspired by my grandmother, I encourage you to learn your personal and family health history. Talk to relatives,

even the shy ones. These conversations are important for helping understand your cancer risk.

I found that with my family, good food and fun activities help make the conversation easier. For example, my family loves cookouts and neighborhood block parties. Holidays and events like Thanksgiving and family reunions are also perfect opportunities to learn and share.

Essentially, cancer prevention and control is about wellness. Wellness [PDF] is defined as a dynamic process of becoming aware of and making conscious choices toward a more balanced and healthy lifestyle. It is important to make wellness a part of every dimension of life—social, physical, emotional, occupational, intellectual, environmental, spiritual, and financial.

Celebrate Her Health

During May, we celebrate Women's Health Month and National Women's Health Week. During this time, I am involved in my community, providing tips and talks about women's health, cancer prevention, and reducing health disparities. Celebrate by making sure you are current with your yearly well-woman's visit and preventive screenings. Do a wellness heartbeat checkup on yourself every day. Then, pay it forward by encouraging women in your life to do the same.

My personal mantra is: Master your Ps of life—peace, purpose, and pleasure—by putting your health first.

Remember…

Take one minute…

To just be

Take one minute…

To eat and heal from the green earth

Take one minute…

To do a heartbeat check

Take one minute…

To lace up and move

Take one minute…jou

To keep life simple and safeguard your mind and your time …Take one minute, one minute to celebrate what matters most.

Your self-care, Your self-love

You're worth it!

Love,

Dr. Teri

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