Introducing Survivors' Table!

I want to work through my own questions about cancer nutrition and, hopefully, provide information that is useful for cancer survivors.

May 6, 2017 By Danielle Penick

Every week in my work as a dietitian I hear about a new diet or supplement from my patients that has sent me to PubMed to fact-check the details. Combing through this information can be difficult for me as a health professional, not to mention overwhelming for someone newly diagnosed with cancer who doesn't have a background in health or nutrition. My motivation for creating Survivors' Table was to work through my own questions about best practices for cancer nutrition and, hopefully, provide information that is useful for cancer survivors. I've had several family members affected by a cancer diagnosis which also inspires me to write about evidence-based cancer nutrition as there is a great deal of suspect information available.

We live in a time when we have more access to health and nutrition information than ever before. Yet, paradoxically, there seems to be even more confusion about health and nutrition than there has been in the past. I certainly don't have all the answers—there are new studies published on diet and cancer every day—but I will try to sort though the facts and misinformation to understand the best practices we have today.

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of speaking to a group of breast cancer survivors who call themselves Tennis for Life. They meet regularly to play tennis at clubs near my home in Raleigh, North Carolina, where they provide support for those actively undergoing treatment as well as celebrate those who are in remission. I showed up early one Sunday afternoon to watch them play, and we then headed into the clubhouse where I was to give my talk. At first I was a little intimidated—I had never been asked to speak in a room without a projector or access to PowerPoint slides. But before I could get ten minutes into my material, a flood of questions broke forth.

It had been a long time since I spoke with a group of cancer survivors all together, and I had forgotten how intense the questions could be. A cancer diagnosis changes your life instantly. It brings new focus to questions you never before had to consider. On top of all the information you get from your doctor or dietitian, there is even more material about cancer and diet online or at the bookstore—some of it good, and some of it not. Many cancer survivors do not even get a chance to talk with a dietitian when they start treatment. For the women of Tennis for Life, this

was their chance to ask all of the questions that had built up about cancer and nutrition.

The ladies at Tennis For Life in Raleigh, NC

One thing that surprised me when I worked full-time at a cancer hospital was the number of questions about new diets or supplements that could benefit cancer patients. It seemed like I learned about a new diet or supplement from my patients every week. Does sugar feed cancer? Is soy okay for breast cancer patients? What about this supplement? Or an alkaline diet? Or eating all organic?

When I first started working with cancer patients I was equally overwhelmed by these questions. I was new in my career, and I had not been able to sort through the research, especially because new diets seemed to emerge every month. I spent nights after work combing through research and talking with colleagues to see what was known about a new diet and what the consensus was within the scientific community. Even now, there are new diets I hear about that send me to Pubmed or Google Scholar to read about emerging studies. I decided to create Survivors' Table to give myself an opportunity to compile this research and, hopefully, provide information that is useful for cancer survivors. I hope you enjoy this journey as much as I do. Welcome to Survivors' Table!

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