Taking Back Control

July 18, 2017 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

When I was first diagnosed in November 2016, I entered the world of non-control. I have always been at one with me - my body and my ability to fight infections. I had been relatively healthy my whole life. When I was 31 after 2 miscarriages I was diagnosed with a funky blood clotting disorder which made my final pregnancy very high risk but still doable. Little did I know that the cancer I would eventually get is driven by hormones and maybe having 4 pregnancies was the first line of leading to the cancer - (note: 4 pregnancies including the 2 miscarriages). But, in reality I will never know what caused the cancer.

I worked downtown in NYC during 9/11 and the months and months afterwards and that has been something in the back of my mind as being a possible cause. I was not a first responder (though my soon-to-be husband was), just a worked in financial services who was asked to open up the office the Monday after 9/11 as I lived within travelling distance via the Staten Island Ferry and I, "had no kids to worry about". I went gladly as a way to keep myself busy and I could not help but take some lunch hour walks by the smoldering heap to just further recognize how our world had changed.

Upon diagnosis, I spent my first few weeks wishing and hoping it was anyone other than me. I would see other moms around and be so jealous that they did not have this potential death sentence over their heads. I forced myself out of that funk by funnily enough reading the newspapers and seeing random deaths all over the world that made me really force myself to get comfortable with mortality. I think it was something I never ever thought of despite the fact that I have gone to wakes and know that people die - I just did not think I ever would.

I still do not think I will die from this but I am focused on being positively focused on controlling what I can. I can control what I eat and I can control what I do with my body on a daily basis. Now that I am through "active treatment" (8 rounds of chemo and 34 rounds of radiation), I have this thing called energy back and I am using it to help keep myself active.

Before I got cancer (and before I went back to work full time three months before I was diagnosed), I would run about an hour and forty five minutes a day each morning in my kitchen (don't judge) and even got to a time of 35 minutes for a 5k, which for me, was fast. I began running about the same time I was told I was allergic to corn, which turned out to be an incorrect diagnosis but led me to basically eat "clean" - as a kid who was born in the 70's my major food groups were home cooked meals without veggies (why bother trying to force 3 children to eat vegetables as that was like telling us we had to kill ourselves in dramatic fashion). So my diet was

never good or “healthy” but I always was tall and “skinny” (I put skinny in quotes because I was really fake skinny - I was within the normal weight category for my height but I was not fit and never exercised - ah the metabolism of youth).

So this new way of eating because of the corn allergy (because corn is in everything processed) meant that I was eating more and more fruits and vegetables and this eating style of mine cascaded down to the children. Even when I was told the corn allergy was incorrect, I still incorporated the healthier foods but I did not continue avoiding processed foods for a few reasons. One reason is the cost - it is tremendously expensive to cook without processed foods and the second reason was the convenience of using a taco kit and making dinner quick instead of making something from “scratch”.

I was going to wait to make changes in my diet and lifestyle until I was a year out from initial diagnosis to give myself some time to relax and just do nothing but I decided (and my waistline growing and growing helped with this as now that I am in medically induced menopause, it is a whole new ballgame in terms of metabolism) to kickstart this new way of eating and living now.

I started slowly by incorporating exercise back into my life and I am now at 45 minutes of running in the early morning. Then I began looking at my diet and started to read some research on keeping cancer out of your body after having had it. I am currently in the midst of researching and currently reading Radical Remission and AntiCancer. I will write more about these books when I am done with them but for now, I am recognizing some common threads about diet in these books and other cancer resources that talk about sugar being the fuel that feeds cancer cells. I have already decided to cut out processed foods, my dark chocolate I love so much and to avoid dairy and meat. I am not sure if this will help me to never have cancer again but I am pretty sure it will help me to look and feel better and keep me as healthy as possible to be able to handle whatever happens next.

None of us know what the future holds but by kick-starting my exercising and helping my body and mind feel healthy and happy I am hoping I can keep cancer the f-out of my body for the rest of my life.

It is something for me to focus on in the time between.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.