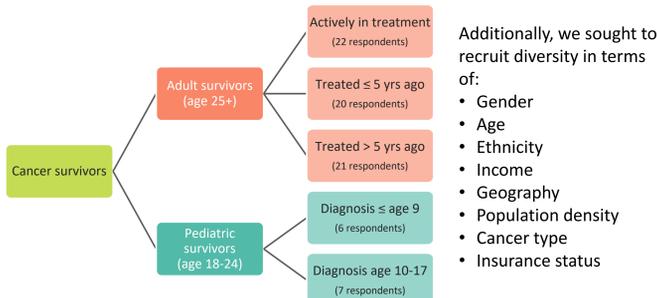


Background and Purpose

- While there are many factors that impact cancer outcomes, research shows that a healthy body weight, physical activity, and healthy eating may improve quality of life and survival, and help reduce the risk of recurrence among cancer survivors.
- To help guide our strategies for supporting survivors around health and wellness, the American Cancer Society was interested in better understanding the experiences and perspectives of cancer survivors related to healthy eating, exercise, and weight control.

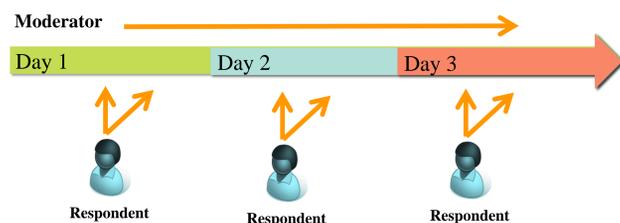
Participants

Recruited two main groups – survivors of adult cancers and pediatric cancers - which were then further segmented into subgroups.



Methods

Online Community



- Online community where participants communicated with moderator and one another – used PC, tablet, or smartphone to post text, video, or photos.
- Respondents logged in at least 2X/day to answer the day's questions and respond to probes from moderator/posts from fellow participants.
- Adult survivors participated for 3 days; pediatric survivors for 5 days.
- Client team observed and sent messages privately to moderator throughout the process.

Results

Adult Survivors

Varied perspectives on the relationship between lifestyle and cancer

- A few take a **fatalistic approach**, believing that "anyone can develop cancer," regardless of what they might do or fail to do. *"I really feel that no matter what you do, if you are destined to get cancer, you will." – Shirlee O., >5 years*
- Some **believe there might be some connection**, but feel other behaviors could be equally responsible. *"I think certain things like cigarettes, sun and alcohol contribute to having cancer, but mostly it's genetic." – Robin P., >5 years*
- Some **are confident that there is a link**, and believe an unhealthy lifestyle can directly result in the development of cancer. *"I definitely think there's a link between cancer and diet perhaps, or cancer and lifestyle issues, such as stress and poverty." – Patricia D., ≤ 5 years*

Health and current lifestyle

- All respondents agreed that it is extremely important for them to now adhere to a healthy lifestyle** because of their cancer history. *"I think eating right, exercising, getting enough sleep and managing stress/pain has a huge impact on my health." – Valerie, active treatment*
- Many describe themselves now as more relaxed, more positive and hopeful, less likely to worry about the "small stuff" and **focused on making healthy choices** to ensure their health continues to be good. *"I feel that I am on the right track as far as getting my health and well-being where it needs to be and keep myself healthy." – Nick Z., >5 years*
- Many of the health goals survivors set for themselves largely mirror those of the general population:** to eat more fruits and vegetables; limit sweets, snacks and unhealthy drinks; lose weight; stop smoking; get regular exercise. *"I try to walk 2-3 miles, 5 days a week to keep myself active. I feel good when I can accomplish this. ...It's something I never did before I got sick." – Larry A., active treatment*
- But most say **remaining healthy is more challenging now after cancer than before**, for a number of reasons, including:
 - Lack of energy affecting their ability to exercise regularly
 - Chronic pain is harder to manage
 - Cancer treatment resulted in serious physical effects
 - Depression
 - Insomnia/inadequate sleep

"I find it almost impossible now to get decent, restful sleep, as I'm in constant and chronic pain every day, from both the fibromyalgia and the lingering side effects from the cancer treatment." – Patricia D., ≤ 5 years



Pediatric Survivors

Cancer experience shapes perspective on health

Respondents say they are much more aware that "good health" entails **emotional and mental components** as well as a physical one.

"I do think that my experience with cancer has affected my view of what healthy means. While a lot of people could think of healthy as just being not sick, I think it goes a little deeper. I think healthy has a lot to do with our quality of life." – Stacia W., diagnosis ≤ 9

"Before, I might have been drawn to the more physical, like what you see on a magazine-type of definition. But for me now, health encompasses so much more. Thinking about handling stress and emotions with mental health, as well as healthy being a life long goal, not just maintaining a healthy weight, etc." – Brittany, diagnosis 10-17

Health and current lifestyle

- Many **taking positive steps** to enhance their health and well-being. These include **"traditional" healthy behaviors...**
 - Getting enough sleep
 - Exercising regularly
 - Cooking and eating healthy meals
- ...as well as activities to improve **emotional and mental health:**
 - Volunteering
 - Drawing/artistic expression
 - Spending time with friends and family
 - Participating in their religious tradition
- Many would like to make **additional improvements:** get more exercise, eat better, get more sleep, be better about socializing with friends.
- In addition to facing many of the same challenges as individuals without a cancer history, these survivors also faced **additional challenges resulting from their cancer experience** that impact their ability to engage in healthy behaviors.



"As a visual artist I find one of the best ways to relieve stress is through the production of art. I specifically love to draw animals and concept designs." – Devin D., diagnosis ≤ 9

"Sometimes I am not the best on making an effort to hang out with friends. I can just be so tired and stressed sometimes that it is hard to give the effort to hang out. But I'm always happy when I do. I just have to make myself do it!" – Brittany, diagnosis 10-17

"Diet. It's very difficult to stay on track. During my treatments, food was a comfort, and I wasn't concerned with my diet at all. So even after everything was done, it's still the hardest part of living a healthy life style." – Stephen, diagnosis 10-17

"I can't drive anymore, due to seizures. I haven't been able to go to the gym. So I need to try to walk the dog more often." – Christopher P., diagnosis ≤ 9

Conclusions and Implications

The post-treatment period represents the biggest opportunity to talk about diet and exercise as the key to getting stronger and staying healthy. Respondents were particularly receptive to the idea that **they could improve their overall health and risk of recurrence.**

Survivors may be more open to messages about health and wellness as they pertain to survivorship and not cancer risk. Survivors were more likely to see cancer as something determined by genetics and bad luck. **However, they did believe that their post-diagnosis lifestyle could impact overall health outcomes.**

Messages about related challenges such as sleeping and stress may be a "way in" to talk about diet and exercise. By framing nutrition and physical activity as a way to address things like getting adequate sleep and minimizing stress, **we can talk about diet and exercise in a way that feels positive and addresses unmet needs.**