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Help for Life After Cancer

Cancer can become a powerful “teachable moment” that inspires many survivors to make major lifestyle changes, such as:

- >Quitting tobacco use
- >Becoming physically active and maintaining a healthy weight
- >Establishing a follow-up care plan with a health care provider

Tim Byers, MD, interim director of the University of Colorado Cancer Center, says he imagines a future in which cancer survivors are actively engaged in physical therapy and rehabilitation during and after treatment, as has become standard with heart disease patients following decades of research on the effects of diet and exercise on heart health.

Many cancer centers have already implemented such programs. To find one for you, ask the center where you were treated what is available, or if no programs are in place, ask who can help you design a plan for your new life as a survivor. Include in your plan physical health, emotional health, and community health. Studies show that, in general, people live longer and have fewer hospitalizations when they have a strong community.

Also, people who can identify meaning in their lives have less depression. Of course, if you are depressed and feeling hopeless, get help from a professional.

Look for joy, and laugh, which research shows has healing qualities. Decide how you want to live the rest of your life and be your own advocate to make it happen.