

CONTENTS

A Plan For Change

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It's not hard to find ideas for improving your lifestyle. Friends and family, health care professionals, books and magazines, and the web offer insight and advice for making a change. As you get started developing a plan, consider the following advice from experts at the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society.

> **Don't be intimidated.** The ACS recommends cancer survivors exercise as often as non-cancer survivors, which means 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise a day. That number may seem daunting to those who exercise rarely, but research shows just three to five hours of walking a week can improve survival in breast cancer patients.

> **Be careful.** Before launching any major change in physical exercise or diet, check with your doctor to discuss your goals and intentions and to identify any risks. If you're struggling with balance or strength issues, consider how to reduce your risk of falls or injuries—perhaps a stationary bicycle would be better than biking outdoors at first.

> **Start slowly.** Those still suffering from the effects of treatment may need time to build strength, and research shows that for many people, gradual lifestyle changes are often more sustainable than quick ones. Try stretching daily, with brief, short walks at first. Cut out fried foods first, then try to reduce red meat and increase vegetables.

> **Consult an expert.** Talk with a registered dietitian who works with cancer patients, and call the ACS to find gyms or trainers in your area that tailor programs for cancer survivors.

> **Know yourself.** Do you like working alone, or do you rely on friends to help you get things done? Do you like change or consistency? Would a chart keep you on track with a new program, or only frustrate you? Experiment with the time of day you work out, and with different types of physical activities to see what works. Figure out what's fun, set shortterm goals, and reward yourself when you meet them.

> **Find a group.** Whether it's to quit smoking or to stick to your weight loss goals,

there may be a group in your area that meets regularly for support. Enlisting the participation of a spouse can also help. Research finds that when a married person makes a positive health change, the spouse is more likely to make the same change.

> **Join a trial.** The National Cancer Institute updates clinical trial information daily on its website (www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials). Some trials include diet, exercise, and smoking cessation. Search in your area, and in the “type of trial” menu, select supportive care, prevention, behavioral, or educational/counseling/training.

> **Surf for help.** Search for physical activity, diet, or smoking cessation tips on www.smokefree.gov, www.cancer.org, or www.cancer.gov. For those who want to take it a bit further, a free Internet service, called StickK.com, launched earlier this year to help people achieve their goals for changing a behavior—quit smoking, exercise, diet—through the signing of a “commitment contract.” Created by three Yale professors and a student, if the user doesn’t achieve their personal goal, they must pay up—giving an amount agreed to in advance either to charity or to a person they designate.