

# Yes, You Can Survive Cancer



Sometimes an article becomes more than an article. Sometimes, it becomes an experience shared and shaped by all those who contribute to it. Such is the case with this month's special section on cancer (p.32), which affected not only the writer who created it, but also the editors, creative director and cancer survivors who helped to bring it to life.

Cancer is not an easy subject to talk about. It is uncomfortable because we know that it can kill us. As the No. 2 killer in the United States, cancer now affects one in three people. What may be most surprising is that malignant cells are in our bodies all of the time. So, in a manner of speaking, we all live with the seeds of cancer. The integrity of our immune systems is what

determines whether the cells are quickly eradicated or allowed to proliferate.

Desiring a story rooted in hope and inspired by a personal knowing, we asked Ken Rosen, a third-year Chinese medicine student, to write the story. Ken was not completely convinced that he was the right person to write it. Having survived cancer twice, once when he was 12 and again at age 25, he confessed that time may not have yet created a distance wide enough to afford comfortable introspection. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, Ken ultimately accepted the assignment. After all, his experience had been so life-changing that it prompted a dramatic career shift from filmmaking into Chinese medicine. Ken knew that what he had learned from cancer should be shared with others.

There is a lot to be learned from this article. Above all, it is that cancer can be a transformational teacher. It can be the event that allows us to get our priorities and health in order. It is not easy to navigate modern cancer cures, especially when mainstream medicine would have us believe we have only a few options. But as Ken writes, and the cancer survivors interviewed for this story ardently

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agree, you should question all therapies, you can find viable alternatives, and you can survive. This month, let's gather the information we need to choose the best path, and then, let's live.

Beth Salmon  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROTH; SWEATER SET BY WILLIAM B., LOS ANGELES

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A Survivor's Guide to Healing

# Cancer

# CROSSROAD

*"You have cancer"*

CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST

A CANCER SURVIVOR TELLS HOW TO TAKE CHARGE OF

Cancer is a modern-day scarlet letter that singles you out as having a dreadful and often incurable disease. I tell you this from my own experience. I was diagnosed with cancer at age 12 and again when I was 25. With all that modern medicine has to offer, it has offered us little other than a means of labeling people earlier and earlier with the big "C" word. Still, early cancer diagnosis has not increased survival rates in many forms of cancer.

BY KEN ROSEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROTH





# DADS

DEVASTATING SENTENCES THAT YOU HEAR IN YOUR LIFE.  
YOUR HEALTH AND YOUR LIFE BY UNDERSTANDING ALL OF YOUR OPTIONS.

"Your fears  
may never  
go away, but  
hope that is  
rooted in your  
heart and  
mind will  
sustain you."

—KEN ROSEN

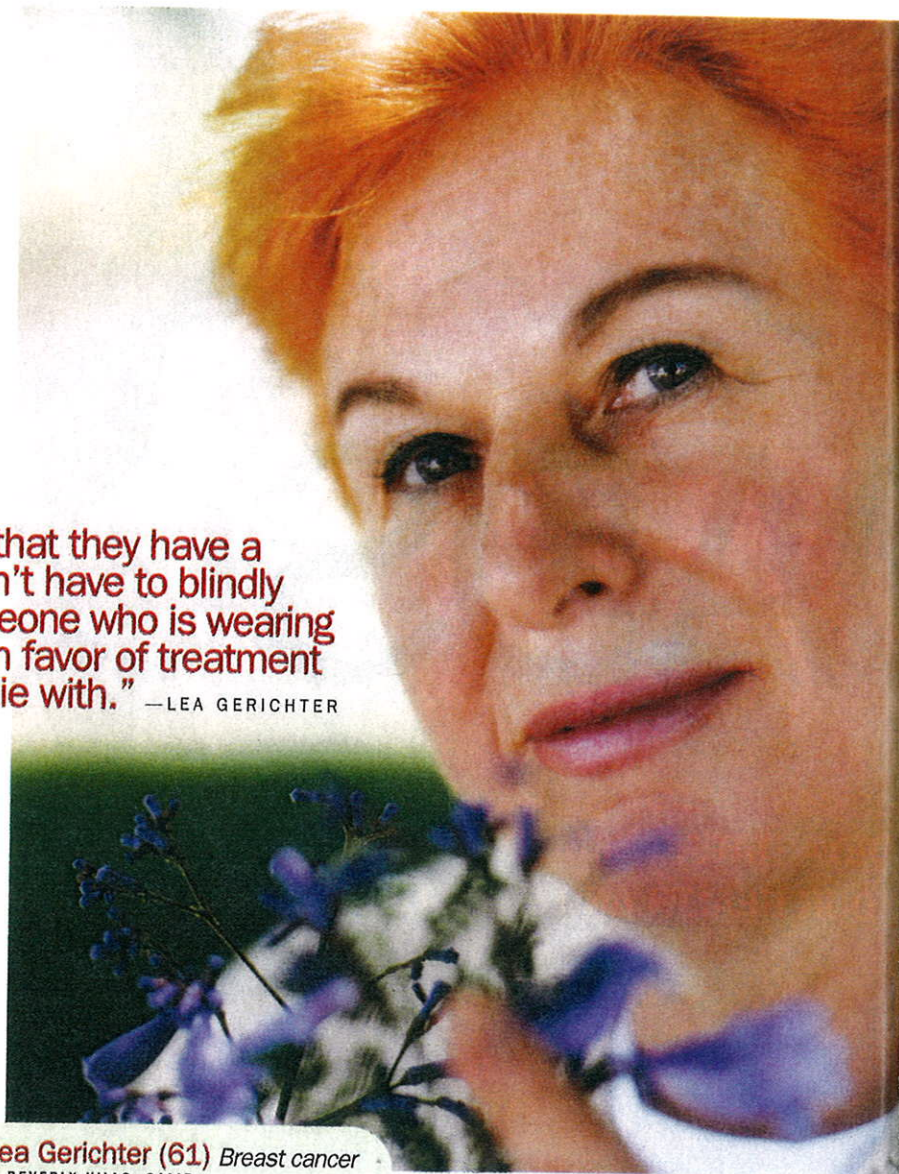


The tendency you have after diagnosis of such a loathed disease is to purge yourself of it by surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. The immediate reaction is to tell your doctor, "Get it out of me. I want to be normal and clean again." Cancer is like that annoying, messy closet or garage that you keep wanting to clean out. If that gets taken care of, you think, everything will be in order. Facing cancer, of course, is far more complex than cleaning out a messy closet. After the emotional upheaval of diagnosis, the ensuing decision-making process of treatment is often a path laden

**"I want people to know that they have a choice and that they don't have to blindly follow the advice of someone who is wearing a white jacket, arguing in favor of treatment that millions of people die with."** —LEA GERICHTER

with many opinions that offer no guaranteed outcome. Often, your choices are clouded by the opinions of doctors, family, friends and your own fear.

So, how do you make an informed decision? And, how do you survive cancer? There are no easy answers. The following is an exploration of modern-day options, a survival guide for anyone who has been diagnosed. The information has been derived from my own cancer experience, as well as my own research and consultation with cancer specialists and physicians. For me, cancer may have started out as my most feared enemy, but ultimately, it became one of my most valued teachers. It taught me balance, the value of a natural, healthier diet and lifestyle, and even facilitated a dramatic career shift. Currently, as a third-year student of traditional Chinese medicine, I have the unique advantage of a larger perspective on cancer therapies. As I learned when faced with cancer diagnosis, the most important step is to simply slow down and reflect. And, above all, no matter what treatment you ultimately choose to pursue, your decision should be based on hope in your heart and mind.



**Lea Gerichter (61)** Breast cancer  
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.

**CROSSROADS** After discovering a 2-mm focus of invasive cancer and a suspicious pattern of calcium deposits, conventional doctors recommended mastectomy and chemotherapy. Fearing the toxic effects, Gerichter sought alternatives that supported her immune system.

**TREATMENT OF CHOICE** A biopsy removed cancer focus. Follow-up included three weeks at Stella Maris, a cancer clinic in Tijuana, Mexico. Immunotherapies included Laetrile injections, lymph massage, coffee enemas and nutritional supplementation. Supplements included selenium, enzymes, Pycnogenol, garlic and vitamins. She now follows a nutritional regimen at home.

**RESULTS** Appetite returned immediately. Energy returned in six to eight weeks. Four years later, Gerichter reports feeling healthy and living normally.

## Two Paths: Fight Cancer or Support Your Body

There are two main branches of thought on treatment for cancer that cancer patients inevitably are forced to consider. One is conventional, and the other can be broadly termed immunotherapy. Conventional medicine's treatment is to attack the disease directly in an effort to beat it back, whereas immunotherapy is about supporting the body's own innate healing system.

Conventional medicine, or allopathic medicine, which is the standard medicine in the United States, literally means "against disease." Instead of treating





cancer as a systemic disease, which it is, we think of it as a loco-regional problem that can be cornered and killed. But, the possibility of completely removing cancer through surgery is limited. As Andrew Weil, M.D., Harvard-trained physician and advocate of integrative medicine, points out in *Spontaneous Healing* (Knopf, 1995), "In far too many cases, cancer has already spread to more than one site by the time of its discovery or is somewhere in the body that is beyond the reach of a surgical cure."

Similarly, another common treatment for cancer—chemotherapy—is not always the best option. Chemotherapy is an extreme treatment that uses toxic chemicals to tear down the body in general and, at the same time, destroys cancer. In addition, the types of cancers that it has been shown successful for is also limited. According to two oncologists, Albert B. Deisseroth, M.D., and Vincent T. DeVita, M.D., of Yale School of Medicine, in a 1995 issue of *Cancer Journal*, "... 90% of chemotherapeutic-drug cures

occur in only 10% of all cancer types."

The other big branch of cancer therapy seeks to strongly support the patient's immune system to control malignant growth. Immunotherapy draws on chemotherapeutic herbs, psychosocial support, dietary changes, visualization and anything else that may kick the immune system into gear. The focus of treatment in this model is not to diagnose and fix a broken machine, but to cultivate a healthy garden in your body, mind and spirit. Many of the immune-building therapies do not promise a cure, but can empower you with an effective framework to manage and live with cancer for years beyond physicians' expectations. In *Spontaneous Healing*, Weil supports the wisdom of immunotherapy. "Cells turn malignant constantly, and normally the healing system eliminates them," he says. "... Cancer will always be with us. Prevention remains the best strategy for managing it, and that depends on the integrity of the healing system."

## After Diagnosis: Seven Steps to Healing

The most valuable step after a cancer diagnosis is becoming an active participant in your healing. Here's how.

**1) REDUCE ALL STRESS.** The ability to calm yourself in the midst of a busy world has been proven by Herbert Benson, M.D., of Harvard Medical School to provoke distinct physiological changes, including muscular relaxation and the slowing of the heart rate, respiration and brain waves. He put all his evidence into a book called *The Relaxation Response* (Avon, 1990—first published in 1975) and proved that it promotes health. This is a learned state of mind. Meditation, hypnosis and guided imagery are all worth exploring.

**2) EDUCATE YOURSELF AND FIND A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL WHOM YOU FEEL YOU CAN TRUST.** One of the most

## TREATMENT RESOURCES

Here are six promising alternative treatment resources for people diagnosed with cancer.

### 1) **Commonweal Cancer Help**

**Program:** This is a one-week retreat for cancer patients intended to reduce stress and help them to explore treatment options and lifestyle changes. The Commonweal staff can also refer you to other programs. Contact them at P.O. Box 316, Bolinas, CA 94924; (415) 868-0970; or visit their Web site: [www.commonweal.org](http://www.commonweal.org).

### 2) **Traditional Chinese medicine**

**(TCM):** Most people know Chinese medicine as acupuncture, but other branches of this traditional medicine, such as herbalism, nutrition and exercise, are worth looking into. Seek out a practitioner who has experience with treating cancer patients. For referrals, contact the American Association of Oriental Medicine, (610) 266-1433; or in California, the California Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, (888) 432-5669. Another good place to find a practitioner is [www.acupuncture.com](http://www.acupuncture.com).

**3) Block Medical Center:** This center was established by Keith Block, M.D., who became macrobiotic when conventional medicine was unable to cure an illness he developed shortly after entering medical school. Macrobiotics is an outlook on life that is

primarily known for its mostly vegetarian, high-complex-carbohydrate and low-fat diet. Block bases much of his program on macrobiotics. His staff designs individualized treatment programs integrating conventional and alternative treatments. Contact him at 1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 515, Evanston, IL 60201; (847) 492-3040.

**4) The Moss Reports:** Ralph Moss, Ph.D., is a world-renowned speaker, writer and researcher on cancer treatments. He publishes his findings in the *Moss Reports*, which costs \$275. The *Moss Reports*, 144 St. John's Place, Brooklyn, NY 11217; (718) 636-4433, or visit [www.ralphmoss.com](http://www.ralphmoss.com).

### 5) **Livingston Foundation Medical**

**Center:** Developed by Virginia C. Livingston, M.D., in 1971, these immunological treatments include diet, supplements, vaccines, counseling, detoxification and conventional drug therapy, which act to enhance immune response. Contact the center at 3232 Duke St., San Diego, CA 92110; (888) 777-7321.

**6) Cancer Control Society:** The non-profit Cancer Control Society provides public education on the prevention and control of cancer and other diseases through nutrition, tests and non-toxic alternative therapies. Contact them at 2043 N. Berendo St., Los Angeles, CA 90027; (323) 663-7801.



complete works on cancer is *Choices in Healing* (MIT Press, 1996) by Michael Lerner, Ph.D. The book is the culmination of 10 years of research on integrating conventional and alternative cancer therapies. This book is well worth a thorough read before any decisions are made about any therapy. The complete text of the book is also available on-line at Commonweal's Web site: [www.commonweal.org](http://www.commonweal.org).

**3 BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK.** A landmark 10-year breast-cancer study by David Spiegel, M.D., found that women who participated in weekly group therapy sessions had twice the survival time than a group of women who did not. The experience of cancer patients sharing their stories with each other engenders hope and nourishes a sense of connection to others that may actually facilitate healing. Your spouse, family and loved ones cannot do it all. But, ask for help researching therapies, getting to medical appointments, cooking and exercising. As Weil says, "Learn to be a gracious recipient of their help." A good place to begin researching a support group is Oncolink: <http://oncolink.upenn.edu>.

**4 DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPRESS EMOTION.** Many cancer specialists suggest that expressing your emotions—especially anger—instead of suppressing them, can mitigate the progress of cancer. Discovering a creative outlet for unwanted emotions, such as a journal, exercise or art, has been clinically

## NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

If you are actively managing cancer, supplementation becomes a very individualized issue based on the type of cancer you have and the state of your immune system. The following are some of the most promising supplements that can help strengthen your immune system and be part of a cancer-prevention or treatment plan. Work closely with your practitioner to create the optimal plan.

**Astragalus:** This herb has been clinically shown to improve white-cell counts. Buy in tincture or capsule form or as part of an immune-boosting formula. Take as directed.

**CoQ10:** If you feel very weak, take up to 200 mg of this vitaminlike nutrient, which increases oxygenation of the heart and liver cells.

**IP6:** IP6 (inositol hexaphosphate) or phytic acid occurs naturally in the bran, or hull, of all grains and beans. IP6 has been shown to prevent tumor growth and even shrink existing tumors. While most of the

studies have been done with laboratory animals, human studies have shown that IP6 inhibits the growth of prostate cells and adenocarcinoma. Work with your health-care practitioner while using IP6. While some experts recommend up to 8 gm daily, seek the advice of your physician to determine a dosage suited to your needs.

**Maitake mushroom:** New research with maitake suggests that it is a potent cancer fighter. The general dosage to support the immune system is 6 mg of the D-fraction form two or three times daily (liquid or capsules). Therapeutic dosages, however, have been as high as 100 mg daily.

**Reishi mushroom:** This tonic mushroom has been clinically proven to boost immune function. Available in tincture and tablet. Take as directed.

**Selenium:** 200 mcg per day.

**Vitamin C:** This antioxidant helps to rebuild injured tissues and inhibit tumor growth. Take up to 5,000 mg a day.

**"I don't believe in the cancer therapies that are sold to you and determine for yourself what is best. At the end of the day, your treatment will be returned to you in one form or another."**

proven to be great for your health. Facing your fears is also primary in overcoming obstacles to healing. This may require going deep within and sitting humbly with yourself. A great book to read on this subject is *Cancer as a Turning Point* by psychotherapist Lawrence LeShan, Ph.D. (Plume, 1994).

**5 EVALUATE YOUR DIET.** Diet cannot be overemphasized as a

factor in cancer management and prevention. What you eat creates a body ecology that can make you more or less at risk for cancer. The increased intake of processed foods, vegetable oils, margarine, sugar and an excessive amount of rich food has been correlated to an increase in cancer in the past 60 years. Dietary therapy for cancer management is too broad a subject to tackle alone; it should be supervised by an open-minded health-care professional. Your nutritional regime will depend on the type and stage of your cancer, and whether you are a deficient, weak person or a hearty, robust individual.

**6 EXERCISE.** Regular aerobic exercise is really oxygen therapy. A study from Germany published last year in the journal *Cancer* found that patients who engaged in regular aerobic exercise after finishing their course of high-dose chemotherapy recovered their energy faster than those who rested instead. As Weil also suggests, "If your aerobic capacity is limited by your illness, you can start with some type of meditative exercise—such as yoga, tai chi or qi gong—and add more aerobic activity as you get stronger."

**7 PREPARE FOR A HEALING CHANGE.** You may get worse before you get better. Healing changes happen with any therapy you decide to work with, whether it is radical dietary change or radiation. There will be changes in your body and mind that may not always be comfortable. Being conscious of these changes is half the battle. Cancer can offer a deep appreciation for life itself. ■

**SELECTED REFERENCES** Benson, H. *Timeless Healing: The Power of Biology and Belief* (Scribner, 1996) ■ Beinfeld, H and Beinfeld, M. "Revisiting accepted wisdom in the management of breast cancer" *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* (1997); 3: 35-53 ■ Hellman S. and Harris J. "The appropriate breast cancer paradigm" *Cancer Research* (1987) 47:341 ■ Lerner, M. *Choices in Healing: Integrating the Best of Conventional and Complementary Approaches to Cancer* (MIT Press, 1996) ■ Weil, A. "Complementary care for cancer" *Self Healing* (January 1998)

**Lee Tessina (58) Hodgkin's disease**  
LOS ANGELES

**CROSSROADS** Diagnosed in 1981 with jelly-bean-sized nodes on his neck. Doctors recommended six weeks of chemotherapy or 14 weeks of full-body radiation. Tessina turned down both, and instead attended a Cancer Control Society convention to investigate options.

**TREATMENT OF CHOICE** Primarily nutritional; Tessina spent four days at a cancer clinic in Mexico and began treatment with megadoses of vitamins and Laetrile. Follow-up at home included a continuation of the clinic regimen, a special diet and practicing visualization techniques.

**RESULTS** Although the nodes remain, 15 years later, there is no sign of cancer. Tessina reports never having experienced pain or discomfort.



are available in the United States today. Read up  
remember that the amount of faith you put into  
rate of your recovery." —LEE TESSINA

