Long-term Side Effects of Radiation Treatments

By Julann Ashman, RN, OCN

When you received radiation therapy, the purpose of this treatment was to do controlled cellular damage to a precise targeted area. The energy delivered to the cell disrupts and separates the DNA in the nucleus of the cell. The normal healthy cells rejoin, but the cancer cells are not so smart and they are not able to repair themselves, they just melt away. When the healthy cells reconnect they want to remain connected so they rejoin very strong and become fibrotic (stiff.) This is why you may feel some firmness or density in the area of treatment. And, this is why sometimes the healing scar from radiation may cause strictures in the treatment area.

Follow up care and medical procedures to keep your body functioning properly are important. For example, sometimes when radiation is passed through the rectum to treat rectal cancer, you may have a small scar patch the size of a pea, which could cause a pulling

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Hear Me Roar

By Eileen A. Kumpon

Yes, I Am a Survivor

It will be 5 years in April that I was diagnosed with breast cancer. As I look back, it was very difficult, to say the least, to even talk about my breast cancer. I did not want anyone to know. I was scared. I could not sleep at night. I had my two lumpectomies, but they did not get all of my cancer out with the first surgery. The second surgery was worse because I did not know if the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes. As it turned out, the cancer was confined. I was blessed!

All I had to have was 38 radiation treatments. As I had these treatments, I looked at all the others who were coming in. They were, by far, worse off than me. They had breasts removed and they had to have chemo, too. They would tell me of the side effects they have had to endure, and I would pray for them, because I had it easy with just the radiation. I did not lose my hair, nor did I throw up continually. I was more than lucky just being so tired.

I have to thank Lourdes Hospital for all the great care I received during my treatments. The caring staff was there for me and all the other patients. They gave me hugs when I needed them. They encouraged me to go on each day even though I was so sore from the radiation and so very tired.

They encouraged me to join Lourdes Breast Care Support Group, which I did.

In the support group, I found ladies who spoke of their breast cancer, who gave hugs, who let me cry when I needed to. No one is turned away from this group and everyone in the group cares about those who come monthly. We share all our feelings. We are all survivors! We never forget what we have endured. We know deep down what we all went through in a way that others cannot understand. We appreciate all the days we are cancer free!

I pray the rosary daily thanking God for being a survivor. Yes, I am a survivor!
The Stress of Survivorship ("What do I do now?")
By Debbie Callahan, LCSW

From the time of diagnosis through treatment, patients experience many different emotions. You might think that once treatment ends, things will go back to "normal" and that you can leave your cancer behind. So, we celebrate the end of your treatments, but survivors often continue to feel anxious or sad, or worried about the cancer returning and often ask, "What do I do now?"

Survivors begin to realize that the end of treatment frequently means new questions or concerns. The support you may have had from friends or staff is no longer there. In the back of your mind, you are always wondering and waiting for a recurrence. Routine appointments and scans to monitor your condition are essential; however, many patients do not look forward to these appointments and avoid them because of fear.

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Just as coping is important through your initial diagnosis and treatment, it is also important to deal with stress post treatment. It takes time to recover from everything you go through. Patients often talk about finding a "new normal." You may need to continue to make adjustments related to your routine, diet, job, support, financial, and other matters. Small amounts of stress can be helpful in that it helps you make changes and it doesn’t take too much effort to start to feel positive again. However, high levels of stress can be harmful. It can increase risk for other problems, both physical and emotional.

First, you need to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress. Some common signs may include: anger, irritability, tearfulness, headaches, fatigue, depression, problems with memory or concentration, sleep problems, loss of appetite, lack of energy or ambition, isolation. Often, family or friends are able to see these symptoms before you are.

Second, look at how you have dealt with stress in the past. What do you usually do to cope with stress? How effective are these coping methods? Every individual has their own unique way of coping. Some common examples may include: exercise, walking, gardening, photography, journaling, music, humor, spirituality, yoga. Also being with family or friends or support groups helps. Some people may need to seek counseling if coping becomes too difficult and emotions are interfering with common activities of daily life. There is nothing wrong with needing help.

Third, try to incorporate new ways of coping into your life. Experiment with different techniques to find what “fits” with your personality or situation. Be ready to face the challenges of life and being a cancer survivor. Being educated and actively involved in your survivorship plan helps you to feel more in control.

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Gentle massaging of the irradiated tissue helps break down the firmness. You may use any soothing lotion or cream to massage the skin, too.

Radiation dosages given in the 1980’s often were larger with bigger treatment fields than today. As people are surviving longer, we now know that those who received chest irradiation for Hodgkin’s Disease twenty years ago have a higher risk of developing breast cancer today. Careful follow up allows for identification and treatment of late side effects from past treatment which otherwise may never be found.

Today’s radiation delivery takes into account the long term results from unnecessary exposure. To decrease the dose to surrounding healthy issue, Intensity Modulated Radiation Treatment (IMRT) is used. Lourdes Hospital has incorporated IMRT technique for cancer care since 2002. So, the long term side effects should be less in the future due to advances in treatment delivery.

You can no longer compare your treatment to other patients who received treatment in the past. If you are still experiencing side effects from your care, please ask your health care team on your next survivorship exam.

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Rules of Engagement

Crying helps us express what words often cannot say and does not always signify depression. Let’s put some rules of engagement about crying into place:

- Tears are normal human expression of emotion that helps reduce toxins and lower body’s stress level.
- Crying relieves built up tensions and fear.
- Don’t be ashamed of crying or embarrassed when you cry.
- Find someone safe to cry with. This person does not have to be family. It can be a friend or member of the health care team.
- Explain to loved ones, both children and adult, why you are crying.
- Allowing tears to flow signifies to others that you need some extra TLC, patience and comfort.
- Crying does not signal depression or mental health crisis.

Western culture in 2010 remains a tear-defying society. Children, both genders, are discouraged from shedding tears. While crying is more tolerable in females, young males are conditioned to hold back tears or be viewed as weak.

It is time to rethink tears and promote better understanding of this age old practice. The tear is a primal expression of emotion. The human tear drop is composed of chemicals and hormones which flow from tear glands into eyes and are released from ducts located in the upper lids. Recent scientific data confirms crying has positive benefits. It opens lungs, cleans and exercises eyes, and releases tension and built up emotions. Crying is liberating – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. However, a person crying often upsets family members and health care team members because we’re conditioned not to feel comfortable witnessing tears.

So, when patients facing the emotional rollercoaster of cancer confide to me that they are often reduced to tears, I often shock them by saying, “Great, cry me a river because it’s okay to cry and some things in life are worth our tears.” They search my eyes and say, “Really? It is okay to cry? Will you explain this to my family? Is this a safe place to cry? I’m not crazy or losing it?” And, my response is, “No, you’re being human.” I further explain that crying is natural, normal and soul-liberating.

Let’s face it, the cancer experience is frightening and the patient and their family face a whirlwind of emotions. These include denial, fear, guilt, anger, depression, powerlessness, sadness, regret, and family acceptance. This experience and the ups and downs of treatment are unsettling. Being encouraged to have a good heart felt cry or promote a primal scream is therapeutic. It gives us control to at least express raw emotions.

And, yet, if you are not a crier, that is okay, too. You will work through the emotions in your own way and on your own terms.

Living Well Series

Lourdes Regional Cancer Center offers the Living Well Series designed to address the full spectrum of concerns associated with cancer. Each month, the program will include question and answer time with a Medical Oncologist and Palliative Medicine specialist followed by different medical professionals speaking on different topics.

The series is open to everyone living with cancer, caring for someone with cancer, or in the support network of a person with cancer. It is not necessary to be a patient at Lourdes in order to attend.

The series is held from 5:30–7pm in the Lourdes Lecture Hall (with the exception of the April session which will be held in Lourdes Hospital East/West Dining Room.) A light meal is served. Call 798-5418 to register to attend.

The schedule for the remainder of the year is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 28*</td>
<td>Cancer Treatment Effects</td>
<td>Dr. Francine Rainone</td>
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<td>May 26</td>
<td>Breast Cancer</td>
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<td>June 23</td>
<td>Lymphedema</td>
<td>Michele Williams, PT</td>
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<td>July 28</td>
<td>Genes and Cancer</td>
<td>Dr. Michael Zur</td>
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<td>August 25</td>
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<td>September 22</td>
<td>Colorectal Cancer</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<td>October 27</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Julie Ashman, RN, OCN, and Deb Callaghan, RN, OCN</td>
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* Please note: this session will be held in Lourdes Hospital East/West Dining Room.
The Diet Prescription for Cancer Prevention

Hundreds of recent studies published in scientific journals around the world have found that curcumin, a constituent found in common yellow curry spice called turmeric, can help us prevent or fight many kinds of cancer. Turmeric is derived from a thick root, like ginger. One recent study performed at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, published in July 2009, enumerated the ways curcumin from turmeric kills cancer cells, without harming normal body tissues:

- Curcumin modulates growth of tumor cells through regulation of multiple cell signaling pathways.
- Curcumin modulates the cell proliferation pathway.
- Curcumin controls the cell survival pathway.
- Curcumin modulates the tumor suppressor pathway.
- Curcumin controls the mitochondrial pathways and protein kinase pathway.

Scoop flesh out of butternut squash with a spoon. In a medium saucepan, combine broth, flesh of butternut squash, garlic powder, onion powder, curry powder, salt and pepper. Set pot over medium heat and bring to a simmer, about 10 minutes. Puree soup with an immersion blender until smooth. Ladle into bowls. Serve with a dollop of Lime Crema and garnish with extra lime zest, if desired.

**Curry Butternut Squash Soup**

Recipe courtesy of Robin Miller
FoodNetwork.com

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Prep Time:** 5 minutes

**Cook Time:** 10 minutes

**Yield:** 4 servings

**User Rating:** No Rating

2 halves roasted butternut squash
2 cups vegetable broth
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon curry powder
Salt and ground black pepper
Lime Crema, recipe follows
Lime zest, to garnish, if desired

Scoop flesh out of butternut squash with a spoon. In a medium saucepan, combine broth, flesh of butternut squash, garlic powder, onion powder, curry powder, salt and pepper. Set pot over medium heat and bring to a simmer, about 10 minutes. Puree soup with an immersion blender until smooth. Ladle into bowls. Serve with a dollop of Lime Crema and garnish with extra lime zest, if desired.

**Lime Crema:**

½ cup reduced-fat sour cream
¼ teaspoon lime zest
1 tablespoon lime juice

In a small bowl, combine sour cream, lime zest and lime juice. Whisk to combine. Serve over Curried Butternut Squash Soup.