

10 Practical Strategies for Surviving with Resilience Ideas Shared by Other ACC Survivors

Question: “I feel overwhelmed by this whole issue of cancer... what can I do about it?”

It has been shown that those who live longer than others with the same type of cancer diagnosis exhibit some common behaviors and approaches. These “survivor” types embrace some or all of the following approaches to their diagnosis and treatment for cancer.

1. Find a doctor who is right for you. Find a primary physician that you trust and like who will be your primary touch point for treating your cancer. This may be an oncologist, but it could very well be your family physician, an ENT, surgeon or other medical professional. Chances are pretty high that you will have an oncology team from several specialties who will participate in your treatment, so having a comfortable relationship with one key doctor can be very helpful in this process. It is always recommended to get a second opinion for any treatment protocol.

2. Build a Support System of Relationships Friends, family, local support groups and on-line support groups can go a long way in providing you with love, information, support, and emotional help. From various contacts and interactions, you can learn how other people have learned to survive and manage difficult life situations such as cancer.

3. Take charge and manage your treatment. Survivors realize that they alone have their disease and they alone have the most influence on the outcome. Ask questions. Be persistent in getting answers that make sense to you. Challenge the establishment. Ask for explanations in plain English or with pictures where helpful. It is highly likely that you will find some insensitive and arrogant doctors and other medical professionals in this process. Don't allow doctors and nurses who talk down to you and treat you like a child to have the final say on how you will approach things.

4. Look for qualified assistants. If you aren't good at recordkeeping, computers, asking technical questions, reading or research, find someone who is willing to help in each of these areas. Families and friends are generally looking for something tangible that they can do to help. Give them a job and they will usually join your “team” and provide an amazing amount of help.

5. Get smart. There is a tremendous amount of information for patients who want to know more about their type of cancer and treatment options. If you are willing to invest the time you can obtain it. Having good information is a fundamental for making good treatment decisions. Books, reports, websites, friends, support group members, videos and your physician are all potential sources of information in this battle.

6. Write down and gather information. Information is power. Keep a notebook or file and write down all of your questions and answers. When you have a pressing question come to mind, write it down. When you find the answer, write that down as well. Review this list periodically to determine what others issues you may want to know more about.

7. Get organized. Ask for copies of your medical reports and then keep them organized in your own file system. It is your right to have copies of any and all records work generated such as lab reports, pathology reports, written scanning results, copies of the CD's of your MRI and CT scans,

surgical reports, etc. Having your own copies can be invaluable since medical records departments have been known to lose copies, or not forward them to physicians when requested.

8. Prepare for doctor appointments. Organize your time with your doctor appointments so you are prepared with written questions. By doing this you stand a better chance of getting all the answers you need from each physician. You also show respect for a doctor's busy schedule. Take your medical records with you to each appointment. It is amazing how many documents can get lost in the shuffle and having your own copies can be extremely helpful.

9. Two heads are better than one. Have a friend or family member accompany you to every doctor visit. Two sets of ears are always better than one. If you aren't good at taking notes, ask them to do that for you. After your meeting with the doctor, have a debrief meeting to discuss what you each heard. This discussion will usually produce some more questions for the next visit. An additional tool to consider is tape recording your doctor visits so that you can return to the tape as often as needed to clarify points of discussion and details.

10. Provide yourself with some positive, uplifting balance and encouragement in each area of your life: Physical, Spiritual, Mental, Emotional and Social

- Read uplifting survivor stories
- Regularly participate in spiritual activities and disciplines that have deep meaning for you, such as church, prayer, meditation, yoga and inspirational and spiritual readings.
- Gather a list of inspirational quotes, pictures, books and writings
- Listen to peaceful and meditative music
- Eat healthy foods in small amounts to maintain even blood sugar levels
- Do some regular, moderate exercise to help with mind-body-emotional issues
- Continue to have regular times of pleasure in your life such as long, hot baths, massage, movies, favorite music, good books, naps, hugs, laughter, visits with friends, going to your favorite beautician, and of course the most important "fun-damental"... enjoy some chocolate!