

What is Survival?

Take this quiz

True or False

- To be a survivor you have to be cured of cancer.
- To be a survivor you have to fight the cancer and beat it.
- To be a survivor you need to keep a positive attitude.
- To be a survivor you have to take special vitamins, antioxidants and herbs to prevent the cancer's return.

The medical definition of survivor is someone alive without evidence of cancer two or five years after primary treatment. The word survivor comes from the French, "survivre," meaning to "live beyond" an event or illness. A more practical definition is: If you had a diagnosis of cancer and are reading this now, YOU ARE A SURVIVOR.

How did you do on the quiz? All of these statements are commonly held beliefs. ALL ARE FALSE.

- You can't really know if you're cured of cancer for many years. Some cancer com back 25 years later
- Some people survive without fighting hard. The cancer may be discovered early or be easy to treat or they may just be lucky.
- No one keeps a positive attitude all the time. It's only human to have doubts.
- In spite of the billions of dollars spent on vitamins and supplements there is no evidence that they increase survival. Research shows it's the food, not the pills that helps.

So if you can't be sure you're cured, don't know if you're lucky, do get depressed or anxious once in a while, and don't eat a bushel of fresh fruit and vegetables each day, **what can you do to be a survivor?**

Asking the question is the most important step. Each person has their own answer. We have been helping patients survive their cancer since we started practice together 30 years ago. With the combined perspective of a medical oncologist and clinical psychologist we've noticed what works and what doesn't work. The programs and workshops we present are based on our experience and a careful review of the scientific literature.

We will help you find your answer.

First some disclaimers and words of warning.

1. Not everybody survives. Some people die. Our job is to help you live as long and as well as possible.

2. Survival requires work. Though some lazy people don't die of their cancer, if you want to improve your chance you may have to change some things.
3. Survival isn't just the persistence of heartbeat and respiration: the Whole Person survives. That includes body, mind, spirit, emotions, relationships, etc. The word "Whole" contains the word "who." What is that "who" who is trying to survive?
4. The greatest tragedy is not someone who dies young. It is someone who doesn't live while they're alive. Don't worry about the near death experiences. What you want are the "near life" experiences.
5. Survival isn't just not wanting to die. Long term survival needs a purpose or reason to live. At some point you have to answer the question, "why do I want to stay alive?"
6. Survival needs a plan. After cancer you can't afford to wander through your life. The plan needs to be inclusive enough to cover the important issues, organized so that it makes sense and you can follow it, and personalized so it is a plan for your life.