



CANCER SMART

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The full articles for these topics are available online at www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart

- Food Safety and You!
- Sun Protection 101
- Cancer and Financial Hardship: The Real Reality
- Skin Cancers

This newsletter is brought to you as an educational service of the Wellspring Cancer Support Foundation.



A Lifeline to Cancer Support
www.wellspring.ca

YOUNG ADULTS & CANCER

By Terra Dafoe, M.A., PhD Student, Counselling Psychology Program
Program Leader, Wellspring You Can Connect Program

Being diagnosed with cancer as a young adult is different.

Cancer is not generally thought of as something that happens to young adults. But it does. Approximately 7,000 young Canadians from the ages of 18-39 are diagnosed with cancer each year (1). While there is generally significant funding and attention given to children and older adults living with cancer in Canada, young adults can be considered an underserved group of Canadians with cancer.

Research and experience shows that having cancer as a young adult is



unique in a number of significant ways.

IDENTITY

Young adulthood is a time of independence, when one's sense of identity and priorities come into their own. At this time many young adults are entering post-secondary education, beginning careers, or moving out on their own; all major transitions towards autonomy. A cancer diagnosis introduces unexpected issues into their lives at this time when most of their peers are enjoying blossoming independence. Suddenly they are confronted with their own mortality, when their peers are barely giving it a second thought, and their newly-found independence is retracted.

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My Diagnosis of Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia

By Raymund Ong



I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) in October of 2008. I was

20 years old. As a result of the chemotherapy treatment I received, I became paralyzed on my entire left side and was forced to withdraw from my second year at the University of Guelph. Being young and diagnosed with both a disease and disability provided challenges to me that I could never have imagined.

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My Diagnosis of Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia

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I was an in-patient at Princess Margaret Hospital for 48 days. They released me when I could walk with a modified cane, though it took great effort. My two year ordeal of medication, hospital appointments, illness, pain and mental and physical exhaustion was overwhelming.

The isolation from my friends was an added torment, for many of them simply did not know what to say to me and waited for me to contact them. With the exception of a few friends and my mother, I fought my cancer battle alone. I eventually found out about a few general support groups for all age groups, but it wasn't until I felt I truly needed them and had to ask the hospital for information. Even after I attended a few of the support programs in the community, I felt isolated once again because I was significantly younger than most of the other people diagnosed in the group. It wasn't until months later that I found out about support programs for the specific issues facing young adults living with cancer. I wish that I had known about these programs sooner, however, I was never informed of them. This needs to change. ■

YOUNG ADULTS & CANCER

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HOW TO CONNECT...

You Can Connect - Midtown Toronto
You Can Connect - Downtown Toronto

COMING SOON!

- www.facebook.com/youcanconnect
- Rightfully named. Wellspring's You Can Connect program is a space for young adults between the ages of 18 and 39 who are living with cancer. It's an opportunity to get together and chat, explore, learn and be social. Guest experts are invited to address topics of interests. Please visit the You Can Connect Facebook page or the Wellspring website for meeting information about the program in Toronto. Not in the Toronto area? Join the growing online community by checking out the Facebook page.

Young Adult Cancer Canada (YACC)

- www.youngadultcancer.ca
- YACC is a national organization for all things young adult cancer related. Its mission is to build a community of young adults diagnosed with cancer that provides information, support, skills and opportunity. Its website has links to information, other survivors, and a number of activities designed specifically for young adults with cancer including: Retreat Yourself, Survive and Thrive Expeditions, Survivor Conference, the "We Get It" video series, Localife, and Shave for the Brave, to name a few. To get connected, visit the site.

Rethink Breast Cancer

- www.rethinkbreastcancer.com
- Rethink Breast Cancer is a charity that brings bold, relevant awareness to women under the age of 40 living with breast cancer. Rethink fosters a new generation of young and influential breast cancer supporters, and responds to the unique needs of young adult women living with breast cancer. To learn more about Rethink, please visit the site above.

Gilda's Club Greater Toronto

- www.gildasclubtoronto.org
- Gilda's Club Greater Toronto is a supportive community where men, women, teens and children with cancer – along with their families and friends – can join with others to build social and emotional support, amongst other things. They have a Young Carers Program for young adults that meet twice a month on Thursdays. Check out the link above for more information.

Often, they might find themselves moving back in with their parents, delaying their education, and perhaps even delaying their dreams. Cancer has now become a HUGE part of their identity.

RELATIONSHIPS

While a cancer diagnosis at any age can complicate relationships with family, friends, partners, etc., it becomes specifically complicated for a young adult. Young adulthood is when serious intimate relationships often begin, and marriages take place or are contemplated. It is one thing to cope with cancer after marriage, but quite another before. How do they share their diagnosis with potential partners? Can their partners handle the uncertainty, or the focus on serious health problems or treatment schedules? What about intimacy? The common reality of hair loss, weight gain, low energy and medical equipment (i.e., a colostomy bag) may not be conducive to feeling desirable. Going to bed with a colostomy bag, or waking up throughout the night to be sick, complicates sexual intimacy.

What about children? Young adulthood is also the prime period for starting a family. How do parents tell a young child that his/her mom or dad has cancer? There are likely to be overwhelming feelings of anxiousness and guilt as they worry whether or not they are going to be present for their child's

“firsts” throughout their lifetime. Raising a child is complex on its own but this complexity becomes even greater when a young parent is living with cancer.

FERTILITY

For some young adults with cancer, treatment can either temporarily or permanently affect their fertility (2). A cancer diagnosis may force some young adults to confront their future parenthood before it has been fully considered. All of a sudden they find themselves asking some seriously tough questions. For instance, do they want children? Will they be able to have them post-treatment? If they have the option before their treatment begins, there are fertility preservation options available.* However, depending on where they live and their resources, these options can end up being rather limited.

ISOLATION

The support of family and friends is invaluable; however, it may be difficult for them to relate to their loved one's experience of living with cancer as a young adult. Isolation may be among the most common and most difficult issues for young adults with cancer. Family and friends may not understand how it feels to be the youngest person by many years in the waiting room, or the only person in their university year that is sick to their stomach everyday, not due to youthful indulgence, but because of cancer treatment. Young adulthood is

supposed to be a period in life filled with carefree living and fun. However, the experiences of many young adults living with cancer do not fit this description. There are probably not many people in their lives who truly understand, and this can be incredibly isolating.

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that being a young adult with cancer is different. Young adult support groups are popping up in major cities across Canada. They range from informal social groups created by young adults who have identified the need to connect, to more structured support groups and information programs offered by local organizations. Many young adults have advocated for support of the recognition that the experience of being a young adult with cancer is different. Due to the dedication and passion of many of these young survivors, the young adult cancer community is coming together. So to all the young adults out there: reach out and connect to the community. There are other young adults living with cancer, and they get it, because they have cancer too.

For more information about the issue of fertility, visit the **Fertile Future website at <http://fertilefuture.ca>.*

Fertile Future is committed to informing, educating, and assisting with fertility preservation for young adults with cancer. ■

1. Canadian Cancer Society, *Canadian Cancer Statistics, 2010*
2. *Ibid.*

The full articles are only available online, please visit: www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart

→→ Food Safety and You!

By Lynda Kuhn, SVP Communications, Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

Safe Snacking for Higher-Risk Canadians

Preparing and eating three meals a day can be overwhelming for people living with cancer. Between doctors' appointments and cancer treatments, it is not only hard to find the time to prepare nutritionally-balanced meals but also to find the energy to prepare meals. Eating smaller snacks throughout the day can be a great way to get the nutrients your body needs, and to help curb the side effects of cancer treatments.

When undergoing cancer treatments, your immune system can become weaker, which makes it more difficult to clear infection and other foreign agents from the body. As a result, chemotherapy, radiation, and some medications may make you more vulnerable to food borne illness, so it is especially important to take extra care when handling, preparing, and eating food.

To access the rest of this article, please visit: www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart

→→ Cancer and Financial Hardship: The Real Reality

By Pamela Bowes, M. Ed., Manager, Program Development, Wellspring

Every week at the Wellspring 'Money Matters' Program, there are personal stories shared from cancer patients who are facing two challenging journeys at the same time – cancer treatment and money problems.

Many people naively believe that "the government" will be there to provide for them when they become sick and need financial support to pay their bills. Or, that their resources such as savings and Registered Savings Plans (RSP), will help them endure. However, the actual lived experience is vastly different from the perception.

To access the rest of this article, please visit: www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart

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→→ Sun Protection 101

By Dr. Lisa M. Kellett, MD, FRCPC, DABD - DLK On Avenue
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Foreword by: Marsha Wallace, Program Coordinator, Wellspring

DLK
ON AVENUE

Whether in the summer or wintertime, the sun can always help to make the day fun and exciting. The sun provides the best source of Vitamin D (which at the very least is integral to strengthening bones and fighting infection). However, overexposure to the sun can also have negative consequences. It is important when outdoors to be aware of how to protect the skin. The skin is the largest organ of the human body and therefore should be protected to prevent premature aging, sun damage, burns or skin diseases such as skin cancer. Although many people tend to expose more skin in the summer months, there should always be precautions taken to protect the skin all throughout the year. While it is beneficial to enjoy the sun, it is important to do so in moderation.

To find out about 10 ways to protect the skin from sun damage, please visit www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart

→→ Skin Cancers

By Drs. Anatoli Freiman, MD, FRCPC & Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCPC - Toronto Dermatology Centre - Members of the Canadian Dermatology Association
www.torontodermatologycentre.com



Skin cancer is the most prevalent of all types of human cancers.



Fair-skinned people who sunburn easily are at a particularly high risk for developing skin cancer. Other less important factors include repeated medical and industrial X-ray exposure, scarring from diseases or burns, occupational exposure to compounds such as coal tar and arsenic, and family history of skin cancer.

To access the rest of this article, please visit: www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart



A Lifeline to Cancer Support

LIVING WITH CANCER

Where do I start? Start here at Wellspring.

WE CAN HELP YOU GET THE PERSONAL SUPPORT YOU NEED.

Wellspring is a network of centres that offer support, coping skills and educational programs to cancer patients and their loved ones at no charge and without referral.

We are excited to introduce the new format of the Wellspring **CANCERSMART** newsletter!

The paper version of the **CANCERSMART** newsletter will now include one full length feature article plus excerpts from three additional articles. To read the entire newsletter with all of the full articles, you can visit the CancerSmart webpage at www.wellspring.ca/cancersmart.

If you would like to order additional copies of the Wellspring **CANCERSMART** Newsletter, please contact Marsha Wallace, Wellspring Program Coordinator at marsha@wellspring.ca.

Wellspring is committed to providing high quality programs that meet the needs of individuals who use them. If you would like to provide any comments about the content, layout or design of **CANCERSMART**, please contact Marsha Wallace, Wellspring Program Coordinator at marsha@wellspring.ca.

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The information in this newsletter is for informational purposes only, and is not intended to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for medical advice. Readers should address all questions and concerns about their health to qualified health care professionals, such as their family doctor or oncologist, and seek their advice before acting upon any information contained in this newsletter.

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