

Making the most of what you've got in pursuit of health

By **Katy Yoder**
Columnist

Part of my recovery has been healing the relationship I have with my body. I didn't realize it was an issue until I started exercising again. Walking with friends was good medicine on so many levels. I began to feel stronger, which encouraged me to do more. Gentle paddles in a kayak, hikes to places I'd always wanted to see and easy rides on my horse all invigorated me.

As the summer came to a close, I was walking around three miles per day. I had plans to do my first 5K with a cancer survivor's group I walked with once a week. But with all that walking, I began to feel a lot of pain in my feet and ankles. Having just gone through the rigors of cancer treatment, I didn't take the pain very seriously. I thought it was just part of getting in shape and — compared to what I'd been through — I could tough it out.

But one day, I realized I was really having trouble getting around. I went to my oncologist and found out that

the post-cancer drug I was on was harming my connective tissues, especially my Achilles tendons. When I went to a specialist, he said I'd done some damage to my tendons and it would take physical therapy and rest to get them back in working order.

It seems I still haven't learned that lesson about listening to your body and making quick corrections when things are out of whack.

Since I couldn't walk long distances, I decided to look into Sisters Athletic Club. I had been a member 10 years before, but quit when I felt too self-conscious about working out with all those fit people. I know, a real counter-productive way to look at it, but that's how I felt at the time.

Tate Metcalf generously offered a free month to try again. He also introduced me to a personal trainer, Chandra Hess who would help me exercise without hurting myself more. I began exploring what my body could do and where I had to be extra careful.

The breast surgery I had caused the tendons under

each armpit to be much tighter and easily strained. My chest area has scar tissue that is still sore from surgery and the radiation that keeps on "cooking" long after the last session. So I was a little apprehensive about how to use my upper body, not to mention the lymphedema lurking in both arms.

I was completely out of touch with my body. I didn't know how to activate muscles; it was as if they'd gone to sleep and I didn't know how to wake them up. Part of that happened long before I got cancer. I was spending long hours at my desk and wasn't balancing that with time getting out and moving my body.

But there was another reason for that disconnect I hadn't addressed. Reacquainting myself with my languishing muscles forced me to take stock and face the fact that getting cancer made me stop trusting my body. Cancer was a betrayal. I had lost faith in my body and didn't trust it anymore.

One reality that I've come to accept is that once you've had cancer the thought of

having it again is never far away. Feeling a strange twinge, something hard under the skin or even being over-tired can trigger a fear of reoccurrence. I don't want to live in fear, so each time it comes up, I work on replacing that fear with faith that I'm OK.

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I'm learning to trust my body again and to open my spirit up to loving and accepting my "soul suit" just the way it is. I'm using exercise as a way to feel that strength returning which gives me more confidence that my body will fight off any cancer cells in the future.

My naturopath oncologist told me something that really

hit home: she said that the most important thing I can do to avoid getting cancer again is exercising at least 30 minutes per day. The movement flushes toxins from your body and keeps everything running smoothly. It wasn't the first time I'd been told that exercise was a key component to my recovery. I just hadn't taken it seriously enough. But the growing fear of going through cancer again was very effective at putting things in sharp focus and motivating positive changes. It's one of the gifts of this disease, discernment and gratitude resulting in the fuel needed to do better.

I'm starting to do some yoga again, too, and I'm really excited to incorporate that into my exercise regime. I'm looking forward to working on controlling my breath, my muscles and learning how to reduce tension. Getting into shape is opening up so many opportunities for me to fully enjoy this amazing place that we call home. I plan to take full advantage of beauty around me. Anyone care to go for a hike?

Partners in Care

For most people, conversations around end-of-life issues can be difficult. It is an important topic, however, and finding an opportune time to talk with your friends and family can ensure you have a chance to explore and communicate your wishes.

Over 90 percent of people think it is important to talk to their loved ones about their wishes for end-of-life care, though fewer than 30 percent have, according to a survey by the Conversation Project. Seventy to 90 percent of Americans say they want to die in their home, though in reality 70 percent of us die in hospitals, nursing facilities, or long-term care facilities.

We all need to make our wishes known, which can be done in several ways. Advance directives, which include living wills and medical powers of attorney, are legal documents in which a person specifies their wishes for end-of-life care. Advance directives should be done by all adults over the age of 18, and ideally should be completed when one is healthy. As people prepare their advance directives, they should talk about their decisions with family members and loved ones, and explain the reasons behind their choices. Of course your wishes may change over time, and these forms can all be updated as often as desired. There are many tools available to help with these discussions.

One is called 'The Conversation Project,' which is a campaign in collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, and aims to be sure people's wishes regarding end-of-life care are expressed and followed. Their website, www.theconversationproject.org, contains a starter kit to help you organize your thoughts, and guides you on ways to have the discussion with those close to you. To learn how Partners in Care can help with these conversations, visit their website at www.partners-bend.org or call 541-382-5882.



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