

# The Southampton Press

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## CANCER JOURNEYS

A Twice-a-month column from  
Fighting Chance

## Survivorship



Diagnosis

Emotional Impact

Treatment/Side Effects

Survivorship

Patient Stories

Once a cancer patient's disease is put into remission the patient enters the phase of the cancer journey known as "survivorship." This is a joyful moment relived by many patients this past Sunday, June 7th, which was observed as National Cancer Survivors Day.

For the last 18 years the oncology social workers at Fighting Chance have counseled East End cancer patients at every stage of their journey. Once they are cancer free there is a new goal: improving their odds of long-term survival and preparing them for a new set of challenges. For example:

**1. Treatment History.** Most patients get chemo and should make a note of the drug combination used. If there was radiation, how long did it last? If a tumor was removed by surgery be sure any complications are fully understood. And, retain a copy of results from blood tests, CT scans, and genomic sequencing.

**2. Long-Term Side Effects.** Chemotherapy can temporarily impair some of the patient's mental functions and memory, so be prepared for "chemo brain." Chemo can also produce a painful tingling in the fingers or toes,

known as neuropathy. And, sometimes breast cancer surgery results in impairment of the lymph nodes which could lead to a condition known as lymphedema.

**3. Maintenance Therapy.** Patients who become cancer-free may still be advised to take medication that can suppress the potential recurrence of cancer. This is commonly known as maintenance therapy and may continue for several years.



**4. Immune System.** A patient's immune system can be degraded by treatments like chemo, although restoration within a few months usually occurs. But, before then, the patient is more susceptible to infections such as COVID-19.

**5. Stress Management.** Another factor that can undermine the immune system is stress, and patients face many stressful moments even after they are cancer free. Many of these patients who have received counseling at Fighting Chance continue their talk therapy with us as a long term stress management strategy.

**6. Yoga/Exercise Program.** Patients emerging cancer free from treatment almost always experience a period of unexpected fatigue. A remedy commonly recommended is a regime of regular exercise. At Fighting Chance we recommend a yoga class -- and provide our patients with classes twice a week (for free) at Yoga Shanti in Sag Harbor.

*by Duncan Darrow  
Founder & Chairman of  
Fighting Chance.*

Fighting Chance has offices in  
Sag Harbor and at the  
Phillips Family Cancer Center  
in Southampton.

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Visit our website at  
[www.fightingchance.org](http://www.fightingchance.org)