

CANCER FOR BEGINNERS

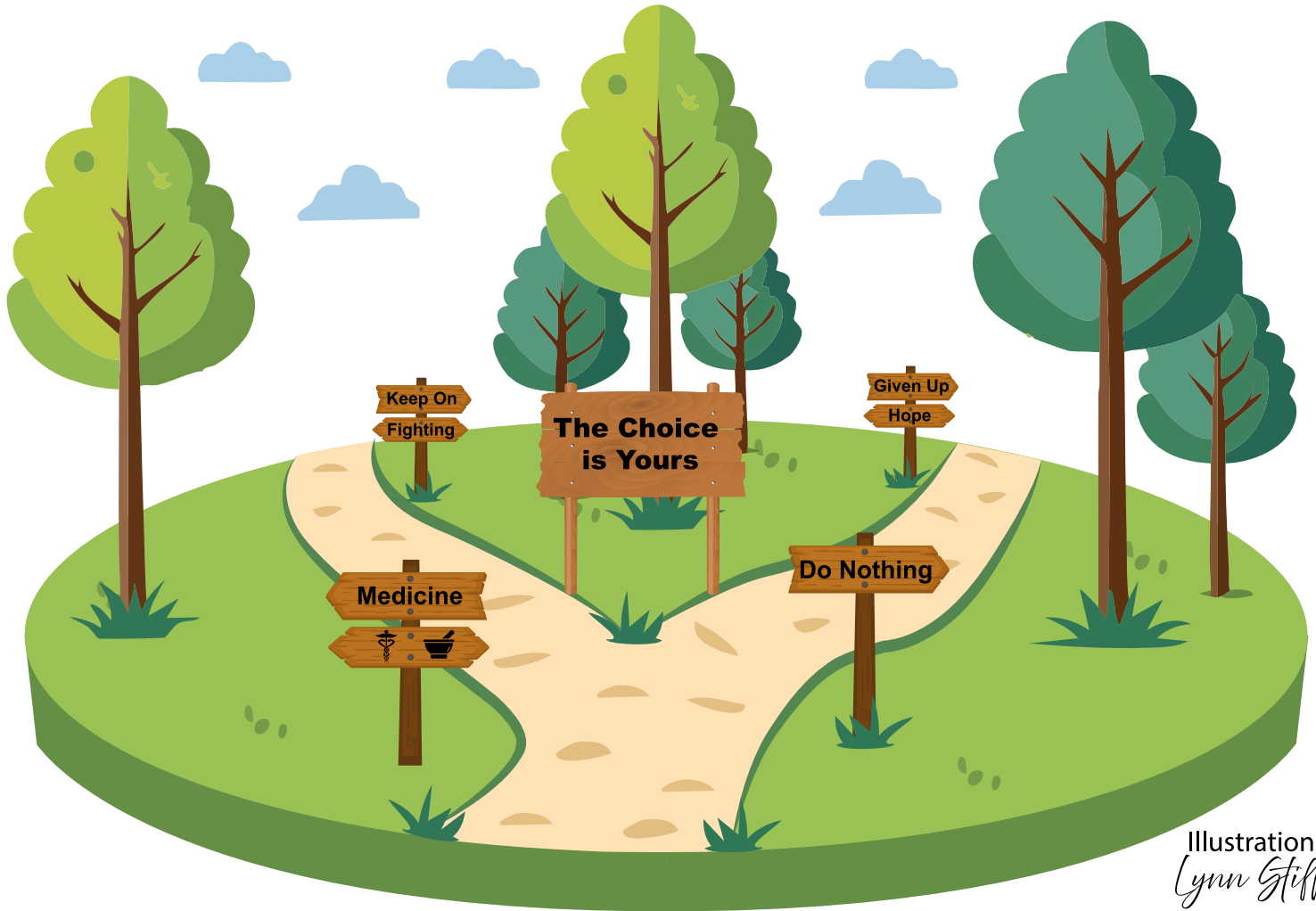


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A Practical Handbook for the Newly Diagnosed

"Okay, you have cancer... so now what?"

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PREFACE

Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming, but an essential next step is finding an oncology doctor who specializes in your specific type of cancer. While you may have a great relationship with your primary care doctor, a specialist will be best equipped to provide the most effective treatment plan.

I have faced cancer—three times. I'm not a doctor, nor a medical researcher nor a professional health writer. Being a husband, father, grandfather, retired U.S. Army soldier, business owner, biker, Christ follower, and a musician makes me *just a regular guy*.

At 38 years old I heard the words, “*You have colorectal cancer.*” In that moment, the world around me shifted. Feeling terrified, confused, and painfully alone, I asked God; *Why me?* You go through an emotional spiral: I asked God for more time, made promises like I will be a better person. Then questioning everything I had done in my life. Suddenly, all my possessions meant nothing, and now what am I going to do?

Several years later, I heard those words again. This time it was a new type of cancer—kidney cancer. That second diagnosis cut even deeper. But it also changed me. It forced me to really look at my life and ask myself, “*Have I made a difference? Have I helped others the way I could have?*”

This book is part of my answer.

I want you to know you're not alone. Yes, cancer is terrifying. Yes, you'll feel lost at times. But you're also stronger than you think. I wrote this guide using everything I've learned—from my experience, my mistakes, my victories, and my faith.

This is not a medical textbook. It's not a magic cure. But it is a **starting point**. It's a straight-talking, no-nonsense guide written by someone who's been there. Use it to ask better questions, make better decisions, and take your first real steps toward fighting back.

Whether you believe in God or not, I believe in you. And I believe you can do this.

Let's get to work.

—*John P. Danaher*

• CHAPTER ONE •

BASICS

SO, YOU HAVE CANCER...NOW WHAT?

Let's be honest. You're scared, overwhelmed, and maybe even numb right now. That's okay. It's completely normal. You're at a crossroads—and you have two choices:

1. **Give up**, accept the diagnosis, and let life play out.
2. **Fight like hell**, learn everything you can, and savor every single day you win.

I chose to fight and while it's not easy, I'm grateful I did. When you're fighting cancer, every sunrise feels like a gift. You start noticing things you once overlooked—the smell of flowers, the way the sky looks, the sound of laughter. You realize what matters.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Cancer doesn't discriminate. It hits the rich and poor, old and young, strong and weak. And no matter how tough you are, the news shakes you. First, you'll feel powerless—like the world is moving on without you. But I promise you, you are **not alone**.

I understand how you feel, and this book is here to walk beside you through those first difficult steps.

WHAT IS CANCER

At its core, cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. Normally, your body knows when to grow new cells and when to get rid of old ones. But in cancer, that system breaks down. Cells grow wildly, forming tumors or affecting the blood (like in leukemia).

These changes often start with damaged DNA. In healthy cells, the body can usually repair that. In cancer cells, it doesn't.

The bottom line? Cancer is serious—but **not unbeatable**. Millions of people have fought it and survived. You can too.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

One of the most important tools you have is **information**. The more you understand your specific type of cancer, the better equipped you'll be to make smart choices. Don't shy away from the facts—even the scary ones. Avoiding information won't make the problem go away.

You'll find tons of opinions online and from well-meaning people, but not all of them are trustworthy. Later chapters will help you find reliable sources.

START WITH YOUR DOCTOR

When you're newly diagnosed, your doctor becomes your primary source of information. But remember **doctors are not infallible**. Every situation is different so picking the best doctor is important. You're entitled to clear, thorough answers—and if you don't understand something, ask again. This is about you and getting well.

Choosing the right doctor is a crucial step in managing your health. Not all doctors are the same; some may be rushed due to practice guidelines, while others might lack the necessary experience to serve as your primary care provider. There are also brilliant doctors who are terrible communicators, making it difficult to understand your own health. Finally, there are great doctors with the right answers.

Your relationship with your doctor is a partnership, and you deserve to feel heard and respected. If a doctor dismisses your concerns or fails to explain things clearly, it's not a reflection of you. It's essential to find a healthcare provider who listens to you, answers your questions, and empowers you to be an active participant in your own care. I was very fortunate to find Dr. Joe. After my consultation, he provided me with good directions for healing.

Ultimately, you are your own best advocate. Don't be afraid to speak up, ask questions, and seek a second opinion. Finding a doctor who is the right fit for you can make all the difference in your health journey. If you feel like you're not getting the answers you need, ***get a second opinion***. We'll talk more about that soon.

TAKE CHARGE - BRING YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

Bringing an advocate to significant medical appointments is highly recommended for several compelling reasons. A second person serves as an invaluable "second set of ears," helping to ensure that you accurately remember and understand all the information, diagnoses, and treatment plans discussed by the doctor. It's common to feel overwhelmed or anxious during these appointments, which can make it difficult to absorb complex medical details. Additionally, an advocate can ask important questions that may not occur to you in the moment. They can provide an objective perspective, raise concerns about potential side effects or alternatives, and help clarify any confusing terminology. Ultimately, having another person present empowers you to make more informed decisions about your health by creating a more comprehensive and supportive environment.

QUESTIONS

Here is a suggested list of essential questions to ask your doctor.

1. What type of cancer do I have?
2. Is it fast-growing or slow growing?
3. What stage is it in?
4. Is this the primary site or has it spread?
5. What size is the tumor?
6. Are the margins clear on my scan/MRI?
7. Do I need surgery?
8. Have you treated this type of cancer before?
9. How many similar cases have you handled?
10. If you were in my position, who would you go to for treatment?
11. Are you doing a biopsy?
12. Will I need chemo or radiation after surgery?
13. What are my treatment options?
14. How soon do we need to begin treatment?
15. Can you recommend someone for a second opinion?
16. Where can I find more information about my cancer?
17. Am I eligible for clinical trials? (if needed)

CHAPTER ONE SUMMARY

This chapter offers guidance for someone newly diagnosed with cancer, framing the diagnosis as a battle to be fought rather than a defeat to be accepted. It provides advice on how to navigate the initial steps of a cancer journey, emphasizing empowerment through knowledge and self-advocacy.

- A cancer diagnosis is an overwhelming and scary experience, but it's a moment to choose to **fight for life** and savor every day, rather than give up.
- **Knowledge is a critical tool** in this fight. The more you understand about your specific cancer, the better prepared you'll be to make informed decisions about your health.
- It's crucial to **be your own advocate** by taking an active role in your care. You should feel empowered to ask questions, challenge your doctor, and seek a second opinion if needed.
- **Choosing the right doctor is essential.** Don't be afraid to find a physician who is not only experienced but also a good communicator who will answer your questions clearly and thoroughly.
- The chapter provides a **list of critical questions** to ask your doctor, covering everything from the type and stage of cancer to treatment options and the doctor's experience with similar cases.

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or doctor recommendations.)

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• CHAPTER TWO •

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TYPE OF CANCER

UNDERSTAND YOUR TYPE OF CANCER

Understanding and defeating cancer starts with taking control of your journey. The initial diagnosis is only the beginning. These steps will help you research your specific type of cancer and find the best medical professionals to guide you in your treatment.

Every type of cancer is unique, with its own traits, behaviors, and effective treatments. It's important to understand your specific diagnosis so you can find information that is relevant to you. For example, a new "cancer cure" for one type of cancer may not apply to yours.

NAVIGATE YOUR CANCER RESEARCH JOURNEY

The internet is a vast source of information, but it's important to be selective. Start with reputable sources to ensure you get accurate and up-to-date information.

- **Begin with trusted sources.** A great place to start is the *American Cancer Society* website. It offers detailed overviews of different cancers, information on treatments, and support resources. From there, you can find links to other reliable medical institutions.
- **Be cautious with online forums.** While support groups and forums can offer emotional support and firsthand experiences, always verify any medical claims or advice with a professional or a credible source like the *National Institutes of Health (NIH)*.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CANCER STAGING

The stage of your cancer is a critical piece of information that will significantly affect your treatment options. You should have a clear, factual understanding of where you are on this scale.

Cancer is often staged using the **TNM system**:

- **T (Tumor)** - The size of the primary tumor and how far it has spread locally.
- **N (Nodes)** - Whether or not the cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes.
- **M (Metastasis)** - Whether or not the cancer has spread to distant parts of the body.

The T, N, and M values are combined to create a stage grouping, ranging from Stage 0 (localized cancer) to Stage IV (most advanced). Use the American Cancer Society's website to understand what your specific staging means.

Another way to understand is this information from the Cleveland Clinic

Most Doctors use a numerical system to stage most cancers. The stages of cancer are:

Stage 0 - There are abnormal cells, but they haven't spread beyond where they started. Stage 0 can also refer to pre-cancerous cells. Most Stage 0 cancers are curable.

Stage I (1) - The tumor is smaller and contained to one area. It hasn't spread to nearby lymph nodes or other areas of your body.

Stage II (2) - The tumor has grown larger and possibly spread to nearby lymph nodes.

Stage III (3) - The tumor has grown deeper into surrounding tissues and has potentially spread to nearby lymph nodes.

Stage IV (4) - Cancer has spread (metastasized) outside of the original site to other organs or distant areas of your body. This is also known as metastatic cancer.

(source: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/22607-cancer-stages-grades-system>)

CHOOSE THE RIGHT DOCTOR AND HOSPITAL

Finding the right doctor, particularly an oncologist, is a crucial step for a successful cancer journey. Oncologists are medical doctors who specialize in diagnosis, treatment, and management of cancer. Their specialized knowledge allows them to create a personalized and more effective treatment plan.

- **Research top specialists.** Look for doctors who specialize in your specific type of cancer. Research the hospitals they're affiliated with, as some may offer different approaches or better patient care.
- **Ask questions.** Don't rush the process. Ask questions and verify claims to make an informed decision. Your health is too important to leave to chance.

My own experience in choosing the right doctor. When I was first diagnosed with colorectal cancer, the doctor told me I'd need surgery to remove my rectum and live with a colostomy bag. It was devastating. But after some initial shock, I started researching. I learned more about my type of cancer and looked for the best available specialist. I found a top-tier military doctor who offered less invasive, high-tech surgery. Thanks to modern techniques and the right expert, I avoided the drastic original treatment plan.

This is why it's so important to find **the right doctor for your health.**

RESEARCHING DOCTORS AND HOSPITALS

There are excellent cancer treatment centers across the country.

(source: News and World Report Best Hospitals for Cancer 2025-2026)

- University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
- Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
- Mayo Clinic
- Dana-Farber Brigham Cancer Center
- Cleveland Clinic
- Massachusetts General Hospital
- UCFS Medical Center
- Johns Hopkins Hospital
- Stanford Health-Stanford Hospital
- City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center

Start by researching top doctors who specialize in your type of cancer. Further, look at the hospitals they're affiliated with. Some hospitals might offer similar treatment results, but the **difference in approach, experience, and patient care** can be significant.

Ask questions, do the research, and verify claims. Don't rush the process—even if time feels short. Making an informed decision now can lead to a better outcome.

DOCTOR SPECIALTIES - A QUICK GUIDE

PRIMARY CARE DOCTORS

- **Family Practice:** Treat all ages; may include pregnancy care.
- **Internal Medicine:** Treat adult illnesses (non-surgical).
- **General Practice:** Broad-based care.
- **Pediatrics:** Treat infants, children, and adolescents.
- **OB/GYN:** Specialize in women's health.

SPECIALISTS

- **Oncology:** Cancer treatment.
- **Radiology:** Imaging for diagnosis (X-ray, CT, MRI, PET).
- **Surgical Oncology/General Surgery:** Perform cancer-related surgeries.
- **Pathology:** Analyze tissues to diagnose disease.
- **Gastroenterology:** Digestive system disorders.
- **Pulmonology:** Lung and respiratory disorders.
- **Nephrology:** Kidney disorders.
- **Endocrinology:** Hormonal and metabolic disorders.
- **Neurology:** Nervous system diseases.
- **Urology:** Male and female urinary tract
- **Plastic Surgery:** Reconstructive procedures after treatment.
- **Nuclear Medicine:** Uses radioactive substances for diagnosis/treatment.
- **Dermatology, Cardiology, Immunology, etc.:** Other important specialties depending on your condition.

CHAPTER TWO SUMMARY

This chapter reminds you to take control of your cancer journey. It's crucial to actively participate in your cancer journey by understanding your specific diagnosis. Cancer isn't a single disease; each type has unique traits and requires specific treatments, so a "cure" for one type may not apply to another.

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or doctor recommendations.)

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal lines designed to guide handwriting. Each set consists of three lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line. These sets are repeated vertically down the entire page, providing ample space for practicing letter formation and alignment. The paper is otherwise blank, with no margins or additional markings.

• CHAPTER THREE •

THE BENEFITS OF A SECOND OPINION

YOUR HEALTH IS AN INVESTMENT

Consider your health as a major business decision where your life is the investment. You are choosing the best provider for the "cost"—not just money, but your time, energy, and survival. You can't afford to be passive or assume the first doctor has all the right answers.

WHY A SECOND OPINION IS CRITICAL

Getting a second opinion for a cancer diagnosis is a common and often recommended practice. Here's a breakdown of the key reasons why it's so important:

- **Peace of mind and confidence in your treatment plan** - A cancer diagnosis is a life-altering event. The information can be overwhelming, and it's natural to have doubts or questions.
- **Confirm the diagnosis** - If the second doctor agrees with the first, it can give you a sense of confidence and reassurance that you are on the right path.
- **Validate the treatment plan** - Hearing a second expert endorse the proposed course of action can help you feel more comfortable and empowered as you begin a long and challenging journey.

Ensuring accuracy and exploring all options - Getting a second opinion is a critical step in ensuring you have an accurate diagnosis and a comprehensive understanding of all your treatment options. While your doctor is a highly trained expert, a fresh perspective can be invaluable. A different specialist, especially one who works at a major cancer center or specializes in specific, rare cancer, may be aware of new, cutting-edge therapies. For example, they might be able to recommend clinical trials, new technologies, or surgical techniques that aren't available at your current hospital. In some cases, a second opinion can even correct a misdiagnosis, which studies have shown is a real possibility, particularly with complex or rare cancers.

This is why exploring all your options is a vital part of your care. A second opinion might reveal that a less aggressive treatment plan is a viable option, potentially leading to a better quality of life.

Accessing specialized expertise - Many oncologists are highly knowledgeable, but cancer is a vast and complex field. A second opinion is particularly valuable if:

- You have rare cancer. Doctors who specialize in a particular type of cancer may have more experience and knowledge about that specific disease and its most effective treatments.
- Your doctor is not a specialist in your type of cancer. This can happen in areas where there aren't many subspecialists. Seeking an expert can ensure you are getting the most up-to-date and targeted care.

Fostering a collaborative approach to care - Many cancer centers have a multidisciplinary approach, where a "tumor board" of specialists (including surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, and pathologists) review each case. When you get a second opinion, you are essentially getting this collaborative perspective. It allows different experts to discuss your case and come to a consensus on the best plan for you.

HOW TO GET A SECOND OPINION

Talk to your doctor. Don't be afraid to tell your current doctor that you would like a second opinion. Most doctors understand and even encourage this, as it helps you feel confident in the care you are receiving. They may even be able to recommend a colleague.

Gather your medical records. The second doctor will need to review your test results, pathology reports, and other medical information to provide an informed opinion.

Check with your insurance company. Before seeking a second opinion, confirm what your policy covers and if there are any requirements for referrals.

SEEING A CANCER SPECIALIST IS VITAL

Expertise in diagnosis and staging. Oncologists are experts at interpreting test results like biopsies and imaging scans to precisely diagnose the type of cancer and determine its stage. This accuracy is the foundation for creating an effective treatment plan.

Access to specialized treatment. Cancer treatment often involves a combination of therapies, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. An oncologist can coordinate this multidisciplinary approach, ensuring you receive a personalized plan that is tailored to your specific cancer, overall health, and needs. There are different types of oncologists (e.g., medical, surgical, and radiation oncologists), and they work together as a team to provide comprehensive care.

Knowledge of the latest research. The field of cancer research is constantly evolving. Oncologists stay up to date with the latest advancements, including new drugs, clinical trials, and innovative procedures, giving you access to the most current and effective options available.

Comprehensive care. Beyond the medical treatments, oncologists and their teams can help manage the side effects of treatment, provide emotional support, and coordinate with other specialists to ensure all aspects of your health are addressed throughout your cancer journey. When you receive a diagnosis, you're at the beginning of a major decision-making process. The initial diagnosis and treatment plan from a general practitioner or a doctor with less experience in your specific condition may not be the best or most current option available.

MY FIRST DIAGNOSIS—A WAKE-UP CALL

When first diagnosed with cancer, I was so mentally fogged and emotionally overwhelmed that I couldn't think straight. On my way home from the hospital, I called my younger sister and broke down crying. She was the first person I talked to.

- Fortunately, my sister has a background in medical transcription, so she understood the healthcare system better than I did. She immediately stepped in and started guiding me. She was the first to tell me: **Don't assume everything a single doctor says is final.** She explained how doctors work within the scope of their own experience and training. They may not be aware of newer, less invasive treatments, or may not have access to cutting-edge studies. When I told her that the doctor had already scheduled surgery and asked her to be there for me, she practically yelled, "Why haven't you gotten a second opinion?"

My responses ranged from:

- “This doctor knows what he’s doing.”
- “He’s already put in so much time.”
- “I don’t want to seem ungrateful.”
- And the classic, “I don’t want to make the doctor mad.”

Let’s put this in perspective so anyone can understand. If you were buying a car, would you agree to the first price offered? Would you worry about offending the salesperson? Of course not. You would probably do your research and shop around. So, why wouldn’t you get a second opinion? With cancer, it’s your **life**.

MY SECOND DIAGNOSIS—A SMARTER APPROACH

After being diagnosed with cancer for the second time, I was determined to take a more proactive and informed approach to my treatment for my new diagnosis, kidney cancer. I knew I needed to be my own advocate, so I immediately sought a second opinion at a leading cancer center. I took the time to gather all my medical records and sent them to the specialist in advance of my appointment. This allowed the entire team to thoroughly review my case and collaborate with their colleagues. Their diligence paid off: a new biopsy revealed not only a new type of cancer (renal cell carcinoma), but also blood clots. These new findings meant the treatment was surgically performing a partial nephrectomy.

MY THIRD DIAGNOSIS, 21 YEARS LATER

After being diagnosed with cancer for the third time, 21 years later, I was determined to take an even more proactive approach. From experience I knew I needed to be my own advocate, so I took my medical records to the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa Florida. I spoke with the oncologist there about my concerns and, together, talked about my treatment options. We ultimately decided on **microwave ablation (MWA)**, a less invasive procedure that directly addressed the new complexities of my case. This entire experience underscored a critical lesson: *being an active participant in your healthcare can save your life.*

REMEMBER

- **Be your own advocate.** Your health is in your hands. Don't be afraid to ask questions, challenge a diagnosis, or seek additional perspectives. It's not about doubting your doctor's abilities; it's about making the most informed decision for your unique situation.
- **Always seek a second opinion.** A different doctor or team may have different expertise, access to newer technologies, or a fresh perspective that could lead to a better outcome. Getting a second or third opinion is not just a good idea, it's essential for your peace of mind.
- **Provide full access to your medical history.** The more information you can provide to a new doctor, the better he can help you. Don't expect him to start from scratch. Send your records in advance so his team can thoroughly review your case before your appointment.
- **Remember that doctors are human.** While they are experts, they may have blind spots or work within a limited scope of practice. Their treatment recommendations are often based on their training and experience. A more advanced or appropriate treatment might exist outside of their comfort zone.

This journey taught me to keep pushing, keep learning, and keep fighting. If your doctor ever seems annoyed by your questions, take it as a sign that you're doing exactly what you should be doing: **advocating for the best possible care for yourself.**

CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY

This chapter reminds you that your health is an investment and it's crucial to be proactive rather than passive.

- **Getting a second opinion provides access to specialized expertise.** This is especially valuable if you have a rare type of cancer or if your current doctor isn't a specialist.
- **A second opinion encourages a collaborative approach to care.** Many cancer centers use a "tumor board," where you benefit from different experts discussing your case and agreeing on the best plan for you.
- **Advocate for yourself and do not be afraid to seek multiple opinions.** This chapter highlights a personal story of how a second opinion led to a different diagnosis and a more effective treatment plan.

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or doctor recommendations.)

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• CHAPTER FOUR •

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

When you're facing a cancer diagnosis, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by all the information and misinformation out there. The internet is full of "miracle cures" and unproven treatments, and it's tempting to believe them, especially when you're desperate for options. I've been in your shoes, and I want to share what I've learned about navigating this landscape, focusing on what's truly backed by science and what's not.

Finding information about alternative cancer treatments online can feel like searching for a specific seashell in the vast ocean—there are countless options, each claiming to be the one you're looking for. This presents both opportunities and significant risks.

On one hand, the internet provides a platform for people to share their personal stories of recovery, often involving non-traditional methods like specific diets, supplements, or repurposed drugs like ivermectin and fenbendazole. For someone facing a cancer diagnosis, seeing these personal accounts can offer hope and a sense of empowerment, suggesting that there are alternatives beyond conventional treatments. Some of these approaches may even have supporting studies from reputable institutions, giving them a degree of scientific credibility.

However, this freedom of information comes with a major downside. The internet is an unregulated space where it can be nearly impossible to distinguish between credible information and dangerous misinformation. Many so-called "cures" are promoted by individuals with no medical training, using compelling but unverified anecdotes. Relying on these claims without professional medical guidance can lead to serious consequences, including delaying or abandoning proven, life-saving treatments. The online world is a chaotic mix of personal stories, biased claims, and half-truths, making it challenging to find the "middle ground" of what is truly effective and safe.

Ultimately, while the internet can be a source of inspiring stories and potential avenues for exploration, it is critical to approach it with a healthy dose of skepticism. Personal experiences, while powerful, should not replace the advice of medical professionals.

The most effective approach for anyone battling cancer is likely a personalized one, combining the best of what traditional medicine has to offer with a thoughtful, informed exploration of complementary therapies, all under the guidance of a qualified healthcare team.

My general rule is this: if a product promises a quick cure for a set price, it's almost certainly a scam. Don't fall for it. It's a sad reality that more money is spent on these phony cures than on legitimate cancer research. I've seen some of the most common myths, like the belief that apricot seeds can cure cancer because of the cyanide they contain. This idea was disproven decades ago, but it still circulates online. When a claim seems too good to be true, it's crucial to do your research. The most recent suggestions focus on boosting your body's immune system. This is practical and makes sense biologically as your immune system is built to handle disease.

CANCER TREATMENT: A PROVEN PATH

When facing a cancer diagnosis, it's important to remember that **effective treatment** relies on proven medical interventions. While a healthy lifestyle, including a good diet and regular exercise, is vital for your overall well-being, it's not a substitute for the specialized care required to treat a complex disease like cancer.

Your oncologist will work with you to create a personalized, comprehensive treatment plan. They will explain the various treatment options available to you such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or immunotherapy. By collaborating with your medical team, you can make informed decisions and choose the best path forward for your specific situation.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

Here are the most common and scientifically backed treatments:

- **Surgery.** For many types of solid tumors, surgery is the most effective first step. It physically removes cancerous cells from your body. It's often used when the cancer is localized to one area.

- **Radiation therapy.** This treatment uses high-energy particles or waves to destroy cancer cells and shrink tumors. It can be used alone or in combination with other treatments. Radiation is highly targeted, meaning it's focused on the cancerous area to minimize damage to healthy tissues.
- **Chemotherapy.** Chemotherapy uses powerful drugs to kill rapidly dividing cancer cells throughout the body. These drugs can be taken orally or through an IV. While side effects are possible, many are manageable, and they are not a reason to avoid treatment. The specific drugs and dosage are carefully tailored to your type of cancer.
- **Immunotherapy.** One of the most exciting and rapidly advancing areas of cancer treatment, immunotherapy drugs work by harnessing your body's own immune system to identify and attack cancer cells. This approach can be very effective for certain types of cancer that have historically been difficult to treat.
- **Clinical Trials.** If standard treatments aren't working or if you have a rare type of cancer, ask your doctor about clinical trials. These trials test new treatments and can offer access to cutting-edge therapies that aren't yet widely available. Participation in a trial also contributes valuable information to the medical community, helping everyone to advance cancer treatment.

NEW POSSIBLE TREATMENT OPTIONS

In the field of oncology, researchers are making significant strides in developing promising new cancer treatments. Here are some of the most notable and emerging options:

IMMUNOTHERAPY AND CELL-BASED THERAPIES

- **CAR T-cell therapy.** This is a highly personalized treatment where a patient's own T-cells (a type of immune cell) are genetically engineered to recognize and attack cancer cells. While it has been highly successful for blood cancers like leukemia, researchers are now working to expand its use to treat solid tumors. A new development, called "EchoBack CAR T-cells," is engineered to be activated by ultrasound, allowing for more precise and controlled treatment.
- **Tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte (TIL) therapy.** This therapy involves removing TILs from a patient's tumor, growing them in a lab, and then infusing them back into the patient to fight the cancer. The first FDA-approved TIL therapy for metastatic melanoma has opened the door for this approach to be used for more types of solid tumors.

- **Oncolytic Vaccines.** These vaccines use viruses to selectively infect and kill cancer cells while also stimulating the immune system to attack the tumor. A personalized mRNA-based vaccine, Enteromix, has shown promising results in clinical trials in Russia, with the potential to be used for a variety of cancers.

PERSONALIZED CANCER VACCINES

- **mRNA Cancer Vaccines.** Similar to the technology used in some COVID-19 vaccines, mRNA cancer vaccines are designed to "train" the immune system to recognize and eliminate cancer cells. These vaccines can be personalized to target proteins unique to a patient's specific tumor.
- **Universal Cancer Vaccines.** Researchers are working on a "universal" mRNA vaccine that would not target a specific tumor but rather stimulate a general and powerful immune response to fight cancer. In mouse models, this type of vaccine has shown potential to work in tandem with other immunotherapies or even on its own.

TARGETED THERAPIES

- **Antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs).** These are like "smart bombs" that use an antibody to deliver a toxic drug directly to cancer cells. By targeting proteins that are only on the surface of specific tumors, ADCs can kill cancer cells while sparing healthy tissue, which can reduce side effects.
- **Precision oncology.** This approach focuses on analyzing the genetic and molecular makeup of a patient's tumor to identify specific mutations or characteristics that can be targeted with tailored treatments. This allows for a more personalized and effective treatment plan.
- **Peptide-based therapies.** Researchers are developing custom-designed peptides that can disrupt a cancer cell's ability to anchor itself and spread. One experimental molecule, "Peptide 2012," has shown promise in shrinking tumors by targeting and disrupting a protein essential for cancer cell survival and metastasis.

OTHER PROMISING APPROACHES

- **Artificial intelligence (AI).** AI is being used in multiple ways to revolutionize cancer care. It can help predict which patients will respond to certain treatments, analyze complex genomic data to identify new drug targets, and even aid in early cancer detection by analyzing medical images with greater accuracy.

- **Light-activated "smart bombs".** A new type of light-activated chemical called cyanine-carborane salts is being developed for photodynamic therapy (PDT). These chemicals accumulate in cancer cells and can be activated by near-infrared light, which can penetrate deeper into tissues, making it possible to treat deep-seated tumors. The chemicals are also designed to flush out of the body more quickly, reducing the side effects associated with traditional PDT.
- **Radiopharmaceuticals.** This therapy uses drugs containing a radioactive substance to diagnose or treat cancer by delivering radiation directly to the tumor. They are designed to minimize radiation exposure to healthy tissues and have shown success in treating specific types of cancer.

HOW CAN I DETERMINE WHAT IS BEST?

Evaluating the right cancer treatment plan with your doctor's input involves open communication, shared decision-making, and a clear understanding of your diagnosis. Begin by discussing the type and stage of your cancer, as this determines the most effective treatment options—such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, or a combination. Ask your doctor about the goals of each option, whether it aims to cure cancer, control its growth, or relieve symptoms. Consider potential side effects, how each treatment may impact your quality of life, and any existing health conditions that could affect your response. It's important to voice your personal preferences and concerns, such as how aggressive you want the treatment to be and what outcomes matter most to you. Seeking a second opinion or consulting with a multidisciplinary team can also help ensure you're making a well-informed choice.

CHAPTER FOUR SUMMARY

This chapter reminds you to be skeptical of online “miracle cures” and unproven treatment, as many are promoted by people without medical training and can be dangerous.

- **A personalized plan** is the most effective approach for treating cancer, developed with a qualified healthcare team and combining traditional medicine with thoughtful, informed exploration of complementary therapies.
- **Proven and scientifically backed treatments** include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and participation in clinical trials.
- **New and emerging cancer treatments** are highly personalized and focus on harnessing the body's immune system.
- **Always advocate for yourself** by asking questions, seeking second opinions, and staying informed about new discoveries.

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or doctor recommendations.)

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• CHAPTER FIVE •

MAKING YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

NAVIGATING SHIFTING EMOTIONS

A cancer diagnosis can be an incredibly isolating experience, even when you're surrounded by loved ones. It's common to feel a profound sense of loneliness as your world shifts and you realize that the lives of your family and friends continue. This can sometimes lead to feelings of resentment that those you care about aren't there for you in the way you need.

It's important to remember that most people in your life, especially those who love you, genuinely want to help but often feel helpless. They may not know what to say, what to do, or how to be there for you without feeling like they are intruding. This can cause them to pull back, not out of a lack of care, but out of uncertainty.

CREATING A PLAN FOR SUPPORT

To bridge this gap and allow your loved ones to be a meaningful part of your journey, it's helpful to create a clear plan. By guiding them on how they can help, you empower them and ensure you get the support you need. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of those around you will help you ask for the right assistance from the most qualified friends and family. Don't ask your sister to cook a specialized meal if she can only burn water.

OTHER PROMISING APPROACHES

- **Communicate your needs.** Instead of waiting for others to guess what you need, be specific. Do you need help with groceries, rides to appointments, or just someone to sit with you and watch a movie?
- **Create a “help list.”** Keep a running list of specific tasks that friends and family can do. This removes the pressure on them to try and figure it out, and it gives them a clear way to contribute.
- **Delegate tasks.** Ask a trusted friend or family member to be your “support coordinator.” This person can manage communications and organize help, so you don't have to.

- **Encourage small gestures.** Let people know that even a short phone call, a text message, or a card can make a big difference. Sometimes, the smallest acts of kindness can mean the most.
- **Accept help gracefully.** Even if an offer of help seems awkward or unhelpful, recognize the loving intention behind it. Acknowledging their effort strengthens your relationship and encourages them to continue their support.

Remember, this is a difficult time for everyone involved, but by opening the lines of communication and giving your loved ones a path to follow, you can strengthen your relationships and build a support system that works for you.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

As you focus on your treatment and recovery, it's also important to plan for the future. Taking these steps will help ensure that your wishes are known and that your loved ones are cared for, no matter what happens.

Navigating a serious illness is incredibly challenging but taking control of your legal and financial future can provide immense peace of mind. While it's a difficult topic to address, preparing these essential documents isn't about giving up; it's about protecting your loved ones and ensuring your wishes are honored.

Taking the time to plan now prevents your family from facing chaos and uncertainty during an already stressful time. Without these documents, important decisions about your care and assets could be left to state laws or difficult family disputes.

KEY LEGAL DOCUMENTS TO CONSIDER

- **Last Will and Testament.** A will ensures your assets and property are distributed exactly as you wish. Without one, state laws will determine who inherits your belongings, which can lead to costly legal battles and family conflict. This is the only way to guarantee your possessions and dependents are cared for according to your intentions.
- **Living Will (Advance Directive).** This document is your voice if you become unable to speak for yourself. It outlines your specific preferences for medical care, such as the use of life support. Having a living will prevents your family

from having to make agonizing decisions about your care without knowing what you truly want.

- **Health Care Surrogate (Medical Power of Attorney).** This form allows you to designate a trusted person to make medical decisions on your behalf if you're incapacitated. In a medical crisis, every second counts. Naming a health care surrogate ensures that crucial, time-sensitive choices can be made without delay by someone who knows and respects your values.

Addressing these legal matters is a critical step that provides you and your family with confidence and clarity. It allows you to focus on your health, knowing that everything else is in order.

CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY

This chapter discusses how to navigate a cancer diagnosis by creating a strong support system and handling legal and financial planning.

Create a clear plan by making a “help list,” delegating tasks to a support coordinator, and encouraging small gestures of kindness.

Be gracious when accepting help. Even awkward or unhelpful offers come from a place of love and good intentions.

Legal and financial planning protects your loved ones and ensures your wishes are honored.

Key legal documents to consider include a last will and testament, a living will (advance directive), and a health care surrogate (medical power of attorney).

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or attorney recommendations.)

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• CHAPTER SIX •

DIET and EXERCISE

THE ROLE OF DIET AND EXERCISE IN CANCER

Exercise and diet play a crucial role in the fight against cancer by strengthening the body's natural defenses, improving overall health, and enhancing quality of life during and after treatment. Regular physical activity helps regulate hormones, reduce inflammation, and boost the immune system—factors all linked to a lower risk of cancer. Similarly, a balanced, nutrient-rich diet supports the body by providing essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that help protect cells from damage and support recovery. Together, exercise and diet form the foundation of a holistic approach to cancer prevention, treatment, and survivorship, helping individuals feel stronger, more energized, and better equipped to face the challenges of the disease.

THE ROLE OF DIET IN CANCER

Your dietary choices are a cornerstone of your overall health and can significantly influence your body's ability to fight and recover from cancer. The information provided accurately points out that a poor diet, often consisting of processed and fast foods, can contribute to health issues. A common mistake is to revert to old habits once in remission, a lapse that can be detrimental. The current scientific consensus, supported by organizations like the *American Institute for Cancer Research* (AICR), emphasizes a plant-based diet as a cornerstone of cancer prevention and survivorship.

The "Do's" of a Cancer-Fighting Diet

Eat your vegetables and fruit. Aim for a diet rich in a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables. These foods are nutritional powerhouses, packed with phytochemicals—beneficial plant compounds—that can help protect your cells from damage. Examples include:

Herbs and spices. Turmeric contains curcumin, a powerful anti-inflammatory compound. Garlic and ginger also have well-documented health benefits.

Choose whole grains. Opt for whole grains like oats, brown rice, quinoa, and whole-wheat bread instead of refined grains. Whole grains are a great source of fiber, which is crucial for a healthy digestive system and can help reduce the risk of certain cancers, particularly colorectal cancer.

Lean meat and healthy fats. While limiting red and processed meat is recommended, when you do eat meat, leaner options like fish and poultry are a better choice. Fish, especially fatty fish such as salmon and mackerel, are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which have anti-inflammatory properties. Incorporate healthy fats from sources like avocados, nuts, and seeds.

The "Don'ts" of a Cancer-Fighting Diet

Limit processed and red meats. The AICR recommends limiting red meat and completely avoiding processed meats like bacon, sausage, and deli meats. These foods have been linked to an increased risk of certain cancers, particularly colorectal cancer.

Avoid unhealthy cooking methods. How you prepare your food matters. Frying, charbroiling, and other high-heat cooking methods can produce compounds like heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) that may increase cancer risk. Instead, opt for healthier methods like baking, broiling, and steaming.

Don't fall for misconceptions. As the provided text mentions, the "alkaline diet" is a myth. While fruits and vegetables are healthy, their benefits do not come from "balancing pH." Your body has a highly regulated system to maintain a stable blood pH, and diet has no effect on it. Focusing on the nutritional value of foods rather than their supposed pH-altering properties is the correct approach.

(Source: [healthline.com/nutrition/the-alkaline-diet-myth](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/the-alkaline-diet-myth))

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE

Exercise is an essential component of cancer recovery and prevention. It's not about achieving peak athletic performance but about finding a sustainable routine that works for your body and your current health status. It is crucial to consult your doctor before beginning any new exercise plan, especially during or after treatment.

The "Do's" of Exercise

Start with light activity. As the information provided notes, even a short walk can make a significant difference. Simple acts like walking the hospital floors post-surgery can build strength and a sense of motivation.

Regular physical activity. Regular exercise has been shown to boost the immune system, improve mood, and reduce the risk of cancer recurrence. It can also help combat common side effects of treatment, such as fatigue and muscle weakness.

Find a routine that works for you. Whether it's walking, swimming, yoga, or cycling, the best exercise is one you enjoy and will stick with. The goal is consistency, not intensity.

The "Don'ts" of Exercise

Don't overdo it. Listen to your body. During treatment and recovery, your energy levels may fluctuate. Pushing yourself too hard can be counterproductive and lead to injury or exhaustion.

Don't ignore your doctor's advice. Always follow the guidance of your healthcare team. They can provide personalized recommendations based on your specific condition and treatment plan.

By integrating these dietary and exercise principles into your daily life, you can take a proactive role in your health journey, supporting your body's ability to heal and thrive.

CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY

Diet and exercise play a crucial role in cancer prevention, treatment, and survivorship. A holistic approach focusing on nourishing the body and supporting its natural defenses is key.

NOTES (Use the space below to jot down research, questions, or doctor recommendations.)

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• CHAPTER SEVEN •

REFLECTION and SURVIVAL

My diagnosis with cancer wasn't a death sentence; it was a wake-up call. At 38, I was first diagnosed with **colorectal cancer** and **renal cell carcinoma**. Twenty-six years later, at 64, I was diagnosed with **renal cell carcinoma** again. For years, I worried about the cancer returning, but when it did, I was calm and ready to fight it with the wisdom of experience.

I've learned that a diagnosis like this forces you to confront your own mortality. It's a reminder that no one's time is guaranteed. My journey has taught me to live each day to the fullest and never take my health for granted. I now understand the importance of a holistic approach to health, focusing on **diet, exercise, and regular check-ups**. It's clear to me that a healthy lifestyle can strengthen the immune system and improve the chances of survival.

My perspective on life and faith has also changed. I've realized that material possessions—my cars, drums, boats—don't truly matter. The most valuable things in life are faith, family, and giving back to others. I believe I was given a second chance to live a more purposeful life, not just for myself but for others. By sharing my story and offering support, I hope to help others who are fighting their own battles.

Based on my experience, I've identified several key factors for survival:

- **Early diagnosis.** The stage of your cancer is critical, but a late-stage diagnosis doesn't mean you can't win. It's vital to get a proper diagnosis and seek a second opinion.
- **Lifestyle changes.** A healthy diet and regular exercise are non-negotiable. Quitting smoking and other unhealthy habits is crucial for a successful recovery.
- **Relentless research.** Take an active role in your treatment. Research all possible options and learn from the experiences of others. Your willingness to find answers will give you the best chance of survival.
- **Mindset.** Your mental and emotional state is a powerful tool. A positive mindset, prayer, and other mind therapies can significantly impact your journey.

Fighting cancer can be a lonely journey, but I've found that faith can fill that void. My prayer is that my story helps you find the strength to fight, the answers you seek, and the peace that comes from knowing you are not alone.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF REFLECTION

What I'm about to say may not resonate with everyone, but I think it's an important part of my story. As I mentioned earlier, I am a believer and a Christ follower.

Looking back on my life, I see how fortunate I've been. I have a wonderful family, have achieved great things, and I am not financially destitute. Yet, as life went on, I drifted further from the church and from God's teachings.

A sudden death from a car crash feels far worse to me because you may not have been right with God at that moment. I have an inner peace now, knowing I have a second chance to get right with God and follow the path he has chosen for me. I feel so fortunate to be able to write this book as a way to give back to those who need it.

Though I served my country, I feel I failed to give back to society in a meaningful, Christian way. I never gave to causes like saving children or to cancer research because I never thought I would be affected. As I look at all the things I've accumulated—my motorcycle, my drums, my cars, my boats—I realize they don't truly matter. You can't take them with you. Rewards in heaven aren't given to those who just pretend to care but to those who care from the heart.

As I finish this book, I pray that it truly helps others in their fight against cancer. When you win your battle, I sincerely hope you will go to a church of your choice and thank God for that blessing. After that, listen to the calling he has for you because he gave you a chance for redemption. Give back to others so they can have a better life than the one they have now. Get involved in helping others fight cancer by doing what you can. Only we know how lonely it can feel to fight this disease, and I've found that God takes that loneliness away.

MY KEYS TO SURVIVAL

The truth about survival is found somewhere within all your research. Here are several factors that increase your chances of beating cancer.

- **Diagnosis and Staging.** The most crucial factor is the stage of your tumor and whether it has metastasized. The earlier your cancer is caught, the more treatable it will be. This doesn't mean a Stage 4 tumor is untreatable, but it

does mean there will be more complications. Getting a proper diagnosis from a qualified physician and then seeking a second opinion is key to recovery.

- **Lifestyle Changes.** If you are still smoking or chewing tobacco, you won't win your battle with cancer. Your diet will also become incredibly important because your body needs the right nutrients to fight. It uses different vitamins and minerals to counteract both the cancer and the side effects of treatment. After you beat cancer, you must maintain a healthy diet to prevent future recurrence. Find a qualified dietitian to recommend a diet based on your specific needs and then follow it.
- **Relentless Research.** I believe your willingness to research all possible treatments gives you the best chance for survival. You can't stop looking for answers until you are cured. I hate looking at all the facts about my kidney cancer; it's a rarer form with a lower survival rate than other cancers. But I still look at all the information I can find because I want to know how others, even those in worse stages than mine, survived. While everyone responds differently to cancer and treatment, we can still learn valuable information from their survival stories.
- **Mindset.** The way you feel in your own mind about your survival is a powerful tool. Your mind can do amazing things when you truly believe in what you are doing. Meditation, prayer, and other mind therapies are said to be connected to survival. Set your mind on survival every single day. Once you are cured, don't let your guard down. Make sure you remember to go to your follow-up visits to keep track of any changes in your health.

My Prayer for You

Lord, please give these wonderful people the strength to fight this hard battle. Let each one of them know they are not alone but walk with you together on their difficult journey. Provide them with the will to search for the answers they seek.

Allow everyone who reads this to find the purpose you have for their life.

Heal their bodies and minds and grant them peace.

In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.



I'm John P. Danaher, and I want to extend my deepest support to each and every one of you facing this battle. May God bless you with strength, healing, and peace of mind. I sincerely wish you success in your fight against cancer--you are not alone.

NOW BEAT THIS THING!

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