

Narrator

Meet Donna Bolkcom. Recently, this New York artist found out she had breast cancer.

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

"After two consultations it seemed very clear that I should start a chemotherapy program immediately."

Narrator

Soon after the first treatments Donna began noticing an unusual side effect, one that interfered with her ability to eat, and put her nutritional health in jeopardy.

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

"Within two or three days I ended up with a large collection of really ... I guess you could sort of describe them as like when you eat too many tomatoes in August and you get canker sores from that ... it was you know a really big problem."

Narrator

Donna didn't expect this particular side effect from the chemotherapy, known as oral mucositis, mouth ulcers or sores, but it is fairly common affecting about 40 % of cancer patients.

Marcelle Kaplan, RN, MS, AOCN

New York – Presbyterian Hospital

"Because a lot of times chemotherapy treatment damages rapidly growing healthy cells and those are the cells lining the whole gastrointestinal track from the mouth all the way down to the rectum."

Natural Sound:

"Feel for any enlarged lymph nodes over here."

Narrator

Clinical nurse specialist, Marcelle Kaplan, of New York – Presbyterian Hospital, helped Donna get through the difficulties associated with cancer treatment.

Natural Sound:

"So it's really important that you maintain your fluid balance."

Narrator

Her mission is to help patients like Donna 'navigate' their cancer experience.

Marcelle Kaplan, RN, MS, AOCN
New York – Presbyterian Hospital

“Nutritional needs are very important because the patient getting chemotherapy or radiation therapy needs to have a good nutritional balance to maintain their strength and to get through the cancer treatments.”

Narrator

The American Cancer Society agrees. Doctor John Seffrin is the Chief Executive Officer.

John R. Seffrin, PhD.
CEO, American Cancer Society

“The better they’re nourished and the more they maintain their physical fitness the more stamina they’re going to have to go through what might be an arduous course of therapy.

But in addition to that it can facilitate faster healing. Some treatments for cancer are very morbid – they in fact cause the patient to be acutely ill and if they have good nourishment and so forth, they will heal faster.”

Narrator

Poor nutrition can certainly interfere with cancer treatment and recovery.

Sue Newberry, Patient

“With losing your taste and your appetite, you just don’t want to eat. And when you don’t have an appetite it’s hard to get food down.”

Narrator

Florida resident, Sue Newberry battled treatment related side effects after undergoing surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy for colon cancer. Sue dealt with dry mouth, diarrhea, temporary loss of taste, and for a time because of the specific chemotherapy drugs she was taking she couldn’t have foods that were too cold or too hot. But had to make sure all of her food was at room temperature.

Sue Newberry, Patient

“You know how long it’s gonna take something to get warm when you take it out of the refrigerator. You fix a salad your lettuce is even going to take time to get to room temperature, your olives will take an hour to get to room temperature, trust me I’ve timed it.”

Narrator

Sue’s ally in her quest to maintain adequate nutrition is Registered Dietician Lesley Klein, with JFK Comprehensive Cancer Center in Atlantis Florida.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS: CANCER AND NUTRITION

Lesley likes to talk to newly diagnosed patients ahead of time about the possibility of treatment related side effects that may interfere with their ability to eat. She wants them to know there is help available.

Lesley Klein, RD

JFK Comprehensive Cancer Center

"At the beginning you may not have any problems: you may continue to eat the way you're normally eating but once the side effects start to occur that's when you need to start following certain restrictions."

Natural Sound:

"What you're describing is a wonderful breakfast, healthy..."

Narrator

Side effects are temporary, but during the treatment period, patients may need to change certain aspects of their diet.

After meeting with her cancer care medical professionals, Donna was advised to change what she ate to accommodate the sores in her mouth and the treatment-related side effects that she was experiencing.

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

"I started using some products, I don't remember the names of them, that my oncologist recommended and um, you know trying to modify my diet, make sure that I wasn't eating more acid type foods."

Narrator

One solution is to provide softer foods, such as cottage cheese, soft scrambled eggs, or milk shakes.

Lesley Klein, RD

JFK Comprehensive Cancer Center

"And one of my favorite recipes is taking one of those chocolate milk shakes putting it in the blender and adding a big blob of peanut butter to it, that way it becomes like a Reese's peanut butter cup."

Narrator

Adequate nutrition is important to help patients maintain their strength and feel better during their treatment, but it also helps them:

- Maintain weight
- Better tolerate treatment and its side effects
- Decrease the risk of infection (and)
- Heal and recover more quickly

Marcelle Kaplan, RN, MS, AOCN
New York – Presbyterian Hospital

“The one thing that they can do – their contribution to their own care and recovery is to make sure that they are as well nourished as possible.”

Narrator

In fact most of the nutritional side effects from cancer treatment are well recognized and most are treatable. By being aware of the possible side effects before they occur and identifying them early on, patients and their doctors can work together to make cancer treatments easier to tolerate.

John R. Seffrin, PhD.
CEO, American Cancer Society

“Knowledge is power. The sharing of information is a two way street. Actually it may be a three way street, but it’s not just making sure that you get good information from your care giver, your physician, your primary provider. It’s also important for you to communicate to them about who you are and what you want and how you’re feeling and what your concerns are.”

Narrator

When we come back, we’ll explore some of the treatments available to help patients get through this difficult time.

Narrator

Until patients begin treatment, they won’t know what or if any side effects will occur. The American Cancer Society suggests some ways they can prepare for their experience. These include:

- Concentrate on yourself and getting well.
- Have a positive attitude. This may reduce anxiety about treatment.
- Plan ahead. Stock the freezer or ask family and friends to help.

Marcelle Kaplan, RN, MS, AOCN
New York – Presbyterian Hospital

“This is a time when friends who are asking how they can help or family members they’re sort of helpless they want to do something that’s useful – this is a time to ask them. But having the ability to reach in your freezer and pop something in the microwave may make a big difference.”

Narrator

It’s especially important for patients undergoing cancer treatment to get good sources of protein.

Lesley Klein, RD
JFK Medical Center

“Protein is the only component of food for building up and repairing tissue that has been torn down.”

Narrator

There are certainly good reasons for cancer patients to eat well. Studies show: people who eat well are better able to cope with side effects of treatment. And they may even be able to handle higher doses of certain medications. In fact, some cancer treatments are more effective in people who are well nourished and are getting enough calories and protein.

But for patients like Donna and Sue who had difficulty just trying to eat the normal foods they had every day it was a tough job keeping up with the nutritional demands during treatment. Donna sought out a support group and Sue talked with a registered dietician. Both approaches seem to have helped.

Sue Newberry, Patient

“The dry mouth that I seem to have had the past few days. Lesley told me that lemon drops which I bought seems to help to get the saliva glands working.”

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

“I think the best thing about the support group is that in the room there’s all these people that they’re in about 3 stages of dealing with cancer and the first time I went I was definitely the new person. I’d been in chemo for 1 week and you’re sitting around the table with a lot of people that are sort of in your stage but also you’re looking at people that are in chemo and they’re looking like they’re going to make it.”

Narrator

Seeking help from a registered dietician or asking a nurse a question is the first step in taking control. Patients often aren’t sure how the treatment might affect them. But experienced specialists can be of great help.

John R. Seffrin, PhD.
CEO, American Cancer Society

“When you’re faced with the diagnosis of cancer, you know that this is big league stuff. That this is life changing and this is life threatening and I would simply say yes yes, but. But if we do the right things it won’t take your life. It won’t threaten your life to the point that you can’t deal with it.”

Narrator

For example, radiation therapy treatments to the pelvic area may cause some patients to temporarily experience treatment-related bowel changes such as diarrhea or bowel gas and cramping. Avoiding foods that are high in fiber or foods that contain milk or lactose may help to manage these effects of treatment.

Lesley Klein, RD
JFK Medical Center

“So, they don’t have the enzyme to digest the sugar in dairy foods. Every time they drink milk they have cheese they even have a baked good that has one of those products in there their body doesn’t know how to get rid of it so the only way they know is to have diarrhea.”

Narrator

A simple solution is to place these patients on a low-residue diet eliminating all dairy foods, whole grains, cereal and fresh fruits and vegetables. If diet doesn’t help, patients need to talk with their doctors to see if medications might work for them.

Another common side effect of cancer treatment involves taste. Many patients have problems with a metallic taste. If this occurs, using plastic utensils and avoiding foods that come from a metal can, may help.

Patients who have lost their taste or have difficulty with food that just doesn’t taste normal should try to exchange their regular foods for foods they don’t like or have never tried before.

Lesley Klein, RD
JFK Medical Center

“If you are you know Irish, maybe you try something that’s more Middle Eastern because it’s not something you’d typically eat and if you don’t like it you haven’t lost anything, but it might wind up being something that you do enjoy.”

Narrator

Consulting a cancer care medical professional is always recommended when patients are unsure what to do about side effects.

When we come back, we’ll take a look at the importance of exercise.

Narrator

When Seattle area mother of two Pat Shimomura was diagnosed with early stage breast cancer, she was completely caught off guard.

Pat Shimomura, Patient

“I learned about my breast cancer when I went in for my annual routine mammogram. I had no family history – I had no reason to suspect.”

Narrator

Pat underwent two lumpectomies and six weeks of radiation. She says that learning about physical activity and proper nutrition helped her get through the experience.

Pat Shimomura, Patient

"The biggest role that learning about nutrition and exercise played in my recovery was the sense of self-empowerment. When you get the diagnosis of cancer it's kind of like, it's kind of like --- WHACK! You can't believe it's happened to you and you don't have much control over your life. But then once you start realizing what you can do as far as becoming more active you feel like you can maybe take some charge of your life again."

Narrator

Anne McTiernan is the Director of the Prevention Center at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Washington. She recommends that all patients incorporate some sort of physical activity in their daily routine. It can help in a variety of ways.

Anne McTiernan, MD

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

"We know that regular physical activity improves quality of life for cancer patients. It reduces fatigue, it improves mood. It also reduces risk of depression and anxiety and it improves physical functioning. It improves a sense of well being, also it improves sleep."

Narrator

Good physical activity can start at home or with a group of friends and it doesn't have to be complicated or expensive.

Anne McTiernan, MD

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

"Patients don't have to go to a gym. They don't have to spend a lot of money in order to exercise. They can exercise on their own at home or go outside for a walk. They can do whatever they enjoy. We always say the best exercise for a cancer patient is the one they are going to do and going to enjoy."

Narrator

Donna Bolkcom also battled with fatigue, which left her feeling weak and unmotivated. To help her get going, she had some girlfriends join her while she exercised.

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

"I just forced myself to get out and exercise to try and see what I could do to counter some of these things because I had read that exercise could cut back the chemotherapy side effects. So I had a group of friends get out there and give it a go."

Anne McTiernan, MD

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

"For many people if they exercise with a group, it helps them keep motivated; it helps them to keep exercising and helps them to exercise safely."

John R. Seffrin, PhD.

CEO, American Cancer Society

"It is true that a diagnosis of cancer is one of the most lonely experiences one will ever experience in life, but if you know that you have someone there with you and is supportive, maybe just a cheerleader for today, they can make all the difference in the world."

Narrator

Each individual is different and the amount of exercise per patient varies. Always consult with a medical professional before starting any exercise program. Pat joined the Fred Hutchinson exercise study after reading an article about it in the newspaper.

Pat Shimomura, Patient

"Knowing that I was to be there at a certain time to exercise really helped me. I think that the increased knowledge of nutrition and physical activity really helped me by improving my mental state. Kind of giving me that information and encouraged me that I was doing the right thing and that I had something that I could do that would help me besides just the doctors and the treatment."

Narrator

If patients haven't exercised in a while, they should start slowly and always consult with a medical professional to see whether or not they're ready to begin exercising. If a patient is overweight, doctors may encourage starting an exercise program and a healthy diet after treatment is complete.

Lesley Klein, RD

JFK Medical Center

"A lot of times when an obese patient comes to me they may be near the end of their treatment. I don't really want them losing a whole lot during treatment because again I don't care if you're overweight or not overweight, when you lose weight you're breaking down fat and lean muscle, and that's going to make you feel nice and tired."

Narrator

Can exercise actually help prevent a recurrence of cancer...we'll take a look at that next, plus offer up some food do's and don'ts when patients are undergoing cancer treatment.

Narrator

Cancer and its treatment may weaken the body's immune system by affecting the blood cells that protect against disease and bacteria. As a result, a patient's body cannot fight infection, foreign substances, and disease as well as a healthy person's body can.

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS: CANCER AND NUTRITION

While the immune system is recovering, patients need to avoid foods, which harbor high levels of bacteria. These include:

- Uncooked meat, fish, shellfish, poultry, eggs and tofu
- Cold smoked fish like salmon
- Unpasteurized products such as milk, cheese, yogurt and commercial fruit and vegetable juice (and)
- Unwashed and raw vegetables and rotting fruits

For a complete list of foods to avoid and tips on food handling, visit the American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org.

Narrator

Patients who want to get out of the house but have a compromised immune system, should avoid going to a restaurant during the prime time hours, like lunch time and dinner time.

Lesley Klein, RD **JFK Medical Center**

"If the doctors already told them their immune system has been compromised, then they want to probably stay away from the salad bar, they want to stay away from crowds in general so eating out may not be the best choice."

Narrator

Some other ways that may help plan a healthy diet are...

- Choose a diet with many types of plant-based food. Try substituting dried beans and peas for meat at some meals each week.
- Try to eat at least 5 colorful servings a day of fruits and vegetables, including citrus fruits and dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables. Colorful vegetables and fruits and plant-based foods contain natural health-promoting substances called phytochemicals.
- Limit foods from animal sources, especially red meats (like beef, pork and lamb) and processed meats (like hot dogs, bologna and salami). Choosing lower fat milk and dairy products can also help you reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat.
- Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- Try to maintain a healthy weight and be physically active.

Narrator

Once patients have completed their treatment, it is vitally important to adopt a healthy diet and to exercise regularly.

Anne McTiernan, MD **Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center**

"Physical activity has several different effects that may help reduce risk of cancer. Exercise affects hormones; it keeps hormones in balance so that hormones that may increase the risk of cancer are kept from getting too high."

Narrator

Establishing a good nutritional plan and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are not only important steps for patients with cancer, but also good advice for everyone! An individual's body, when properly cared for, builds up a tolerance that may help in fighting cancer and its reoccurrence and may help prevent cancer in the first place.

For patients like Sue, Pat, and Donna, each day is another day they get to spend doing what they love to do. They encourage all cancer patients to have a positive attitude and stay involved in their treatment decisions.

Sue Newberry, Patient

"Ask questions, because they will tell you, ask your doctor. It's not complaining. You want to know what to expect and they'll tell you. And I probably didn't ask enough because I probably felt like I was complaining you know (laughs) and you won't catch me doing that (laughs)."

Pat Shimomura, Patient

"I think what I'd like to offer to other women that are faced with cancer or that are just learning about it: is to know that there are a lot of people who've gone ahead of you and they're paving the way for you and finding better routines and more information and that there's a lot of support out there for people."

**John R. Seffrin, PhD.
CEO, American Cancer Society**

"I think the education process is every bit as important as the medical intervention and in fact one probably shouldn't separate the two, they go together, hand in glove. And so the patient that gets good information takes the extra step to say I'm going to take control of my experience gets much better outcomes.

But getting good information, being educated, knowing about your disease and the challenge that it confronts you with and how to get through it can be empowering in and of itself."

Donna Bolkcom, Patient

"Although it's probably a very tough, horrible place in their life at that moment the treatments will come to an end. You're dealing very strongly with your own mortality and maybe its time not to put off some of the things that you said you've always wanted to do. Just Do It!

This program was reviewed by:

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THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS: CANCER AND NUTRITION

American Cancer Society
For more information contact:
American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
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