



## Healthy lifestyle linked to longer lifespan for long-term survivors

By Stephanie Dixon, MD, MPH



*Stephanie Dixon, MD, MPH, is a pediatric oncologist who cares for long-term childhood cancer survivors.*

As a doctor who cares for childhood cancer survivors, I regularly advise my patients to eat healthy and stay active.

A recent [Childhood Cancer Survivor Study](#) report showed that survivors who led healthy lifestyles had a 20% lower risk of death due

to health-related causes than other survivors. Similarly, survivors who did not have diabetes or high blood pressure were at a 30% lower risk of death. The report was published in a leading medical journal, *The Lancet*.

A healthy lifestyle includes:

- Not smoking
- Physical activity
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Limiting alcohol intake

Many cancer survivors focus their health care on cancer screenings and other cancer-related follow-up, which is important. But cancer survivors should also:

- ✓ Visit a primary care provider each year for a physical exam and screening for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.
- ✓ Have a discussion with your provider about ways to keep up a healthy lifestyle.
- ✓ Share your [survivorship care plan](#).
- ✓ Learn more about your health risks.
- ✓ Take steps to reduce these risks.

Working together with your health care providers, you can decrease your chance of developing problems.

# ‘I want to be a healthy grandparent’



Billy and his wife, Kimberly, sometimes kayak while on vacation.

Four years ago, Billy Carson knew his life needed to change.

During checkups, both his primary care physician and his survivorship clinic doctor told him the same thing – he was about to develop type 2 diabetes. His blood sugar levels were high. He was overweight and did not get much exercise.

“OK, now it’s getting serious. I’ve got to try to do something,” Carson said.

Diabetes can lead to conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. Carson, 53, had acute lymphoblastic leukemia more than 40 years ago. He is at risk for chronic health problems because of chemotherapy and radiation. Diabetes would add to his health risks.

The economics and accounting professor joined a healthy lifestyle program offered through his health insurance company.

“If I’m going to be a grandparent someday, I want to be a healthy grandparent,” Carson said.

Since he changed his lifestyle, Carson has lost weight and feels better. Following are some tips that have worked for him.



**Be active:** Carson tries to walk 5,000 steps a day. He takes the stairs at work. He and his wife often walk at a park near their house. When on vacation, they look for ways to be active such as kayaking, canoeing, and hiking.



**Do not buy junk food:** “If it is not in my pantry, I cannot eat it!” Carson said.



**Eat fresh:** Carson tries to eat fresh fruits and vegetables at meals. He limits processed foods.



**Drink water and say no to soda:**

Carson mixes 1 part orange juice to 7 parts water to drink each day. It reduces sugar cravings and keeps him hydrated.



**Lower your sugar intake:** Carson eats fruit when he wants something sweet. He also keeps a bag of dark chocolate candy at work. If he has a craving, he lets one candy slowly melt in his mouth.

“I just think eating healthy, being active, and watching things like sugars, salts, and fats is important,” Carson said. “I think my quality of life is so much better than it would have been had I not decided to make that choice.”

## LTFU Newsletter is going digital

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# Primary care providers and survivors are a team for life

**“I am your physician, but I’m your partner too. You and I work together.”**

That is Dr. Purvi Patel’s belief as a physician. Patel, MD, an internal medicine provider, cares for many childhood cancer survivors at Advocate Medical Group in Orland Park, Ill. It is near Advocate Children’s Hospital in Oakland.

As a childhood cancer survivor, you may face unique health care challenges. A primary care provider can help you manage them. If you don’t have a provider, ask your cancer care team to help you find one. It is important to tell your provider what you need and what is most important, Dr. Patel said.

Share your [survivorship care plan](#) so your provider knows your health care needs. The plan includes a summary of your cancer treatment, possible treatment-related health problems, and needed screenings.

“The survivorship care plan is my bible,” Dr. Patel said. “When I’m talking with patients, I have their chart open. And I have the survivorship guidelines next to it, so I know the whole picture.”

Obesity is a common health issue in childhood cancer survivors, said Dr. Patel, who is certified in obesity medicine. In some cases, survivors may gain weight because of long-term effects of treatment.

*Dr. Purvi Patel cares for long-term survivors of childhood cancer at her internal medicine practice in Orland Park, Ill..*



For example, survivors often have pain and movement problems and may not exercise. Some chemotherapy drugs cause pain in the hands and feet, a condition called [peripheral neuropathy](#). Steroids may cause [avascular necrosis](#), also called osteonecrosis. It causes joint problems.

Your provider can help you plan physical activity that works for you. Your doctor can also help you with nutrition and mental health.

Working as a team, you and your provider can come up with a health care plan that fits your needs.

“I’m trying to be your partner to help you take care of yourself and live a healthy and happy life,” Dr. Patel said.

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## A Word from Us

A recent Long-Term Follow-Up Study (LTFU) report provides strong evidence that healthy lifestyles are important for long-term survivors.

The study showed that survivors who led healthy lifestyles live longer. They can prevent certain chronic health conditions by being active and eating a healthy, balanced diet. In this issue, a long-time survivor named Billy shares how he started exercising and eating better after doctors told him he was at risk for diabetes. His health has improved, and he looks forward to being a grandfather in the future.

Working with a primary care provider is an important part of developing and maintaining good health habits. In this issue, we talk to

Dr. Purvi Patel, an internal medicine physician. She shares her insights about how survivors and providers can work together as partners.

These important findings about healthy lifestyles were made possible because of survivors like you who continue to complete LTFU surveys. I encourage you to keep taking part in our study. You help improve lives every time you do.

**Greg Armstrong, MD, Principal Investigator**



*Greg Armstrong, MD, MSCE, is Principal Investigator of the Long-Term Follow-Up Study.*