



# Cancer survivorship and resilience: a framework for coping

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# Overview

- I. Cancer Survivorship: facts, figures and trends
- II. Brief description of most commonly reported symptoms
- III. Ways to enhance coping with chronic illness
- IV. Normal adjustment and the concept of “post traumatic growth”

# Survivorship: Definition

- “An individual is considered a cancer survivor from the time of diagnosis through the balance of his or her life”<sup>1,2</sup>
- Some definitions also acknowledge the impact of cancer on families, friends and caregivers<sup>2,3</sup>
- To many, “cancer survivor” may indicate someone who “beat cancer” – this is not always the case<sup>1</sup>

*While a patient becomes a cancer survivor at the time of diagnosis, this presentation will focus on the entire cancer experience, including post-primary treatment*

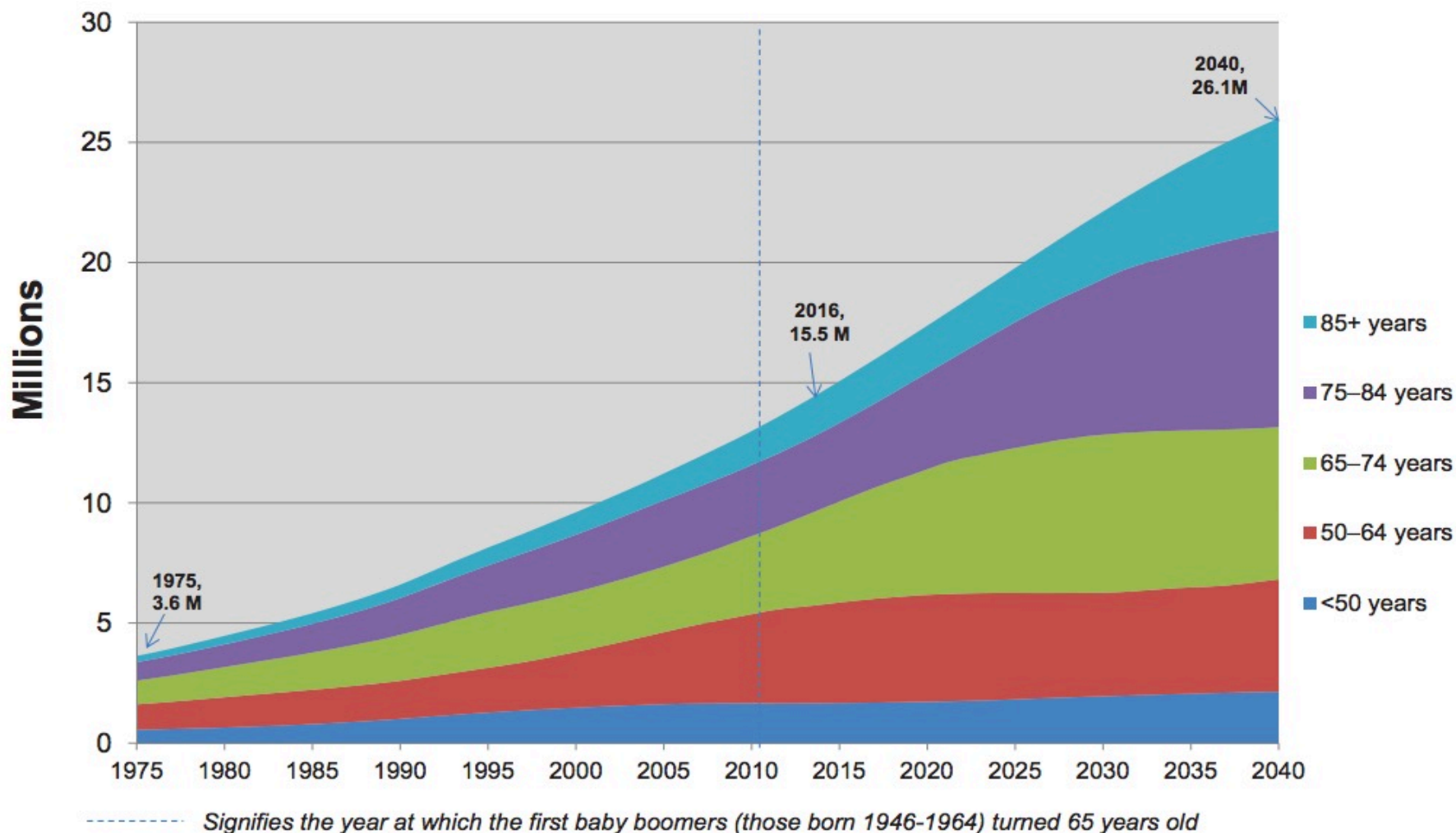
1. National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship. Timeline of Achievements. Available at: <http://www.canceradvocacy.org/about-us/what-weve-done/>. 2. Hewitt M, et al. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2006. 3. National Cancer Institute. About Cancer Survivorship Research: Survivorship Definitions. Available at: <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/ocs/statistics/definitions.html>.



# Cancer facts and figures

- Cancer survivors now number 15.5 million (NCI, 2016)
- Cancer survivors comprise approximately 5% of the US population
- 67% of people diagnosed with cancer today can expect to live >5 years
- 17% of cancer survivors are >20 year survivors
- Still notable disparities in cancer survival depending on specific cancer type and stage

# Estimated cancer prevalence by age in the US population from 1975 to 2040



# Why the Increase in U.S. Cancer Survivors?

- Cancer is primarily a disease of aging. The number of older people in the U.S. is rapidly increasing<sup>1</sup>
- Widespread screening efforts have led to early diagnosis and improved prognosis<sup>2</sup>
- Clinical trials
- Advances in multi-modal cancer treatment have improved survival<sup>2</sup>

1. Cancer.net. Aging and Cancer. Available at: <http://www.cancer.net/coping/age-specific-information/cancer-older-adults/aging-and-cancer>.

2. Hewitt M, et al. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2006.

# Long-term and Late Physical Effects of Cancer

- One in four cancer survivors report poor physical health<sup>1</sup>
- The terms “late effects” and “long-term effects” can be used to distinguish health effects according to their onset<sup>2</sup>

## Long-term effects:

- Prevalent early on and may last for weeks or months
- Persist following acute care and become chronic problems

## Late effects:

- Arise months, years after treatment

1. American Cancer Society. Studies Show Cancer Survivors' Physical and Emotional Problems Often Go Untreated. Available at: <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/news/studies-show-cancer-survivors-physical-and-emotional-problems-often-go-untreated>.
2. Hewitt M, et al. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2006.

# Examples: Long-term and Late Effects

- Symptoms differ from person to person and with each different therapy<sup>1</sup>
- Examples:

## Long-term Effects

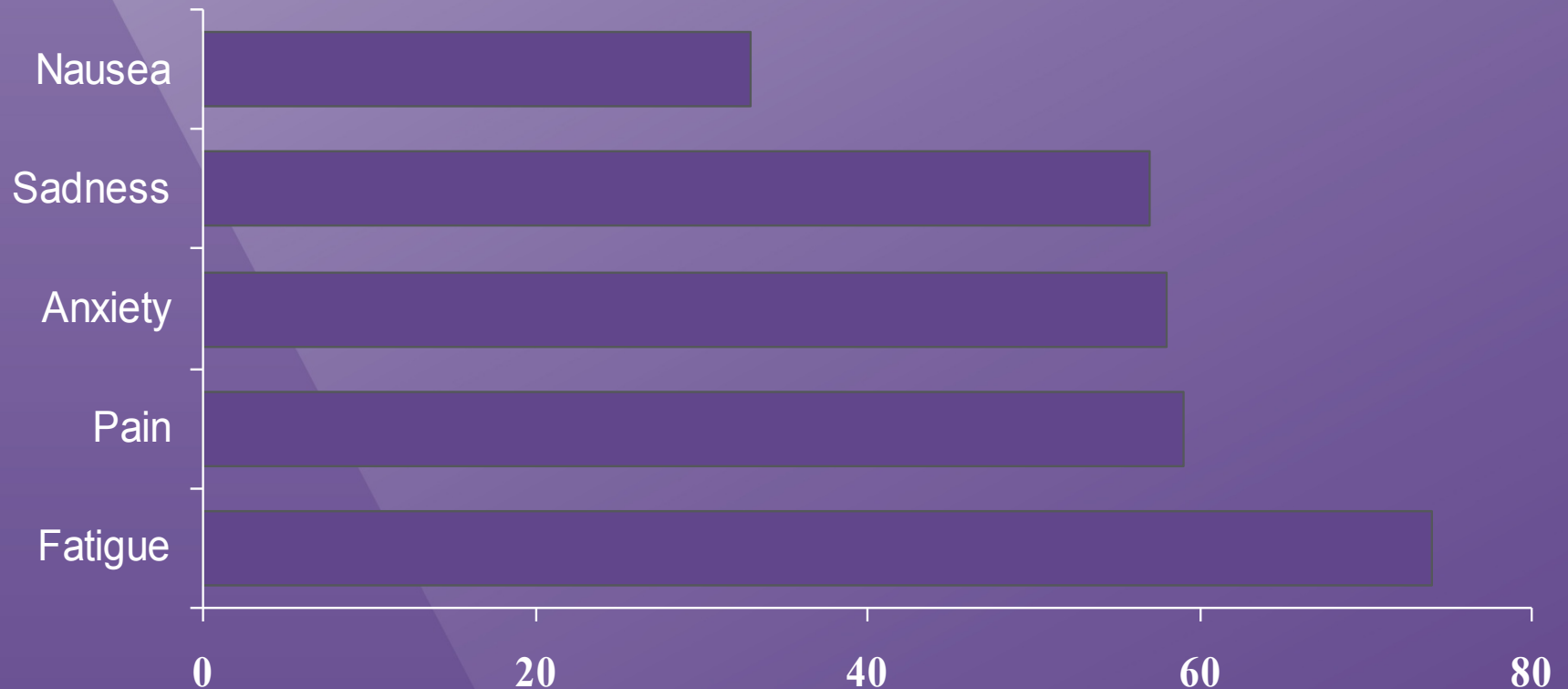
- Treatment-related fatigue, and neuropathies<sup>2</sup>
- Persistent pain<sup>1</sup>
- Skin sensitivity, and lymphedema<sup>2</sup>
- Cognitive changes<sup>3</sup>
- Infections<sup>1</sup>
- Fertility issues<sup>1</sup>
- Premature menopause, andropause<sup>1</sup>
- Skin integrity related to ostomies<sup>1</sup>

## Late Effects

- Heart Problems<sup>2</sup>
- Nerve Problems<sup>2</sup>
- Increased risk of other cancers<sup>2</sup>
- Osteoporosis<sup>1</sup>



# Symptom prevalence



•Cella, Seminars in Oncology, 1998

# Consequences of emotional distress and fatigue

- QOL impairment
- Decreased employment functioning
- Decreased medical adherence
- Increased medical costs
- Increased health risk behaviors
- Decreased health protection behaviors

# Why must these effects be addressed?

- Needs, opportunities & options are often hidden: often patients don't discuss these symptoms with providers and providers don't always ask
- 94% of oncology specialists see support services as a priority for their patients.
- Patients and families want support
- For patients experiencing depression, anxiety, and fatigue there ARE GOOD TREATMENTS AVAILABLE

# Components of Healthy Behavior: Self-Care



Physical activity<sup>1,2</sup>



Nutritional  
recommendations<sup>1,2</sup>



Stress reduction<sup>1</sup>



Medical care<sup>1</sup>

**DIDN'T MAKE IT TO THE GYM TODAY...**



**THAT MAKES 5 YEARS IN A ROW.**

[www.carloneyworld.it](http://www.carloneyworld.it)

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# EXERCISE!



- Exercise is the most strongly supported behavioral intervention for fatigue
- Consult with physician and/or physical therapist
- Surgeon General recommends 30 min moderate activity most days
- Generally, easy to find community resources: look for senior centers, churches, cancer support communities

# Exercise parameters



- Activity pacing: start with 10 minutes, increase time by 20% per week
- Low to moderate intensity to start (e.g. walking, swimming, tai chi)
- Weight bearing exercise to strengthen bones (esp. in menopausal women)
- Gentle stretching and breathing exercises
- Yoga: most rigorously validated fatigue intervention in oncology patients

# Nutrition

- Choose food and drinks in amounts to get to and maintain ideal body weight
- Limit amounts of processed meat and red meat
- Eat at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day
- Choose whole grains instead of refined grains
- Limit alcohol to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men



Rock CL, et al. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2012;62(4):243-274.

# Stress Reduction

There are several basic activities that survivors can use to manage stress:

- Engaging in activities that are enjoyable and create laughter<sup>1,2</sup>
- Scheduling daily leisure time and social activities<sup>2</sup>
- Writing in a journal<sup>1,2</sup>
- Practicing relaxation techniques (e.g., meditation, guided imagery, breathing exercises, yoga)<sup>2</sup>
- Prioritizing tasks<sup>2</sup>
- Asking for help with daily activities<sup>2</sup>
- Attending a support group or counseling<sup>1,2</sup>



1. Livestrong.org. Planning for Healthy Living. Available at: <https://www.livestrong.org/we-can-help/healthy-living-after-treatment/planning-for-healthy-living>.

2. Cancer.net. Managing Stress. Available at: <http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/cancernet-feature-articles/quality-life/managing-stress>.

# Adjustment after diagnosis

- Many cancer survivors show positive adjustment within 1-2 years post-diagnosis (Stanton et al., 2005)
- Positive life changes are reported by the majority of survivors (Stanton et al., 2006)
- Reported benefits include:
  - Greater compassion
  - Enhanced intimacy, relationship quality
  - Appreciation for life
  - Enhancement of skills and strengths
  - Deepened spirituality



# About growth and resilience

- Many survivors show evidence of resilience and growth
- Resilience and/or growth may happen in one area of life experience, yet not another
- Growth and distress can, and do, co-exist!

# What is post-traumatic growth?

- Positive change or growth (Tedeschi et al., 1998)
- Based on two conditions:
  - Presence or major threat or trauma (e.g. cancer)
  - Evidence of positive growth or adjustment related to the trauma (“despite” or “because of”)

# Why focus on post-traumatic growth?

- “The law of floatation was not discovered by contemplating the sinking of things, but by contemplating the floating of things which floated naturally, and then intelligently asking why they did so.”
  - -Thomas Troward

# Responding to cancer in the context of a life

- Ovarian cancer is the “trauma” that brought us together today
- For each survivor, however, that trauma is just one piece of his/her life and lifespan
- Survivor quotes:
  - “I don’t sweat the small stuff anymore.”
  - “I take more time for my family...I don’t take them for granted.”
  - “Having this disease made me realize that there were still things I wanted to do, and places I wanted to go.”



Thank you!